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of Ontario

Second Session, 41st Parliament

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Monday 17 October 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 41^e législature



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Lundi 17 octobre 2016

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 17 October 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 17 octobre 2016

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize Rachel Nauta, a legislative intern who is starting to work in our office today. We're happy to have her joining us. Welcome, Rachel.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Barbara Higgins is in the gallery today. She's the mother of Elisabeth Lawton, one of our pages from my riding. Elisabeth attends École élémentaire catholique Sainte-Thérèse in the riding of Windsor–Tecumseh. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: We will be joined very shortly by students from Villanova College from the great riding of Oak Ridges–Markham. Please help me welcome them to the Legislature.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. I'd like to introduce Kyle Sholes. He's with my office now, from the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme. Welcome, Kyle.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm pleased to rise this morning to welcome, from my riding of Etobicoke Centre, a delegation from the Consulting Engineers of Ontario. They are led by their chair, Mr. Peter Mallory, and their CEO, Barry Steinberg. They're here today for their second annual Queen's Park day. They will have a reception this afternoon that I'd like to invite everyone to, at 5 p.m. in the legislative dining room. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's my pleasure to welcome Stephanie Lowe with the Ontario legislative internship program. I welcome her to team Huron–Bruce and we look forward to the coming months.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure to introduce a number of guests that are here today. The Associação Cultural do Minho of Toronto in my riding of Davenport is celebrating their 39th anniversary. Here for the occasion is the mayor of Arcos de Valdevez, João Manuel Esteves, and deputy mayor Hélder Barros, accompanied by Eduardo Pimenta and entrepreneurs Vasco Lima and Victor Rodrigues, and from the association in the riding of Davenport, Paulo Pereira and Alexandre Da Silva. Bem-vindos ao Queen's Park.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, good morning to you. On behalf of the member from Brampton–Springdale, I'd like to welcome Pearl Quan, who is the mother of our

page captain today, Paige Schneider. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Also here is page captain Bianca Morelli. I'd like to welcome her here to Queen's Park. Visiting her today are her mother, Dahlia Ferrari; father, Jordan Morelli; grandmother, Doris Ferrari; and aunt, Patricia Ferrari. Welcome.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm delighted to introduce a couple of individuals who are here today from Quickcheck Canada, I believe: Roy Toker, executive vice-president, and Elisa Damiano, executive assistant. Also, Speaker, I want to make sure that the members know there will be a reception after question period hosted by Quickcheck Canada.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: It's a great pleasure for me to welcome a school from my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood to Queen's Park today. I am very pleased to welcome the grade 10 students from Cedarbrae Collegiate Institute who will be visiting the Legislature during question period today.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: One last group here from Davenport today. I want to welcome Horizons for Youth, a fantastic organization in the riding of Davenport. They will be coming here today to Queen's Park. Welcome.

JIM PRENTICE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Premier on a point of order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I believe you'll find that we have unanimous consent that we rise and observe a moment of silence to mark the tragic and sudden death of the former Premier of Alberta, Jim Prentice.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Premier is seeking unanimous consent to have a moment of silence for the former Premier of Alberta and the other three victims. Do we agree? Agreed. Please rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you all for that kind gesture.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. I didn't think this government could

possibly mismanage the electricity system any worse than they already have, but then we learned from Fergie in the Toronto Star that the Liberals lost a landmark \$25-million claim by Windstream Energy. That doesn't include another \$3 million in legal fees.

Why are taxpayers on the hook for yet another Liberal scandal? Because they decided to sign a \$5.2-billion energy contract for power that Ontario didn't need and then cancelled the contract when a Liberal riding was about to revolt. Where have we seen this story before? Sounds awfully like the cancelled gas—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order, please.

Please finish.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, where have we seen this story before? It sounds very similar to the gas plant scandal. My question to the Premier is, when will they stop thinking about saving Liberal seats and actually think about hydro ratepayers in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Energy will want to speak to the supplementary. But just on the issue around Windstream and the tribunal decision, I can confirm that Ontario has been advised of the tribunal's decision. The tribunal dismissed the majority of claims made against Canada—Ontario. I think that's important, Mr. Speaker. The final award was significantly less than damages that were being sought by Windstream.

Mr. Speaker, we're looking at the decision and we understand that Canada is doing the same in order to determine if there are next steps to be taken. We're taking a cautious and responsible approach to offshore wind to allow for the development of research and coordination. That's why there's a moratorium on offshore wind development, and the Minister of the Environment is finalizing research on the issue, including decommission requirements and noise over water. Those are issues that need to be resolved before we go forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. The government may want to ignore Rob Ferguson's headline on this scandal, but you know what? The headline was also in the Ottawa Citizen, with David Reevley. It said, plain as day, "Ontario to pay another \$28 million for not producing electricity," this time from a US wind firm. Yet again, there is nothing new with this Liberal government and their failed hydro policies. They have already given away \$6 billion of energy since 2009.

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Ontario has been powering New York and Pennsylvania for years. Now we are paying US companies to produce nothing, to produce no electricity. Mr. Speaker, enough is enough. When will this government learn? Directly to the Premier: Why is it fair for Ontario families to pay for your scandals and bad contracts?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

I do want to remind the leader it's not directly to the Premier, it's to the Chair. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, the Minister of Energy will speak in the final supplementary.

I know that the leader of the third party does not support renewable energy. I know that the Leader of the Opposition does not—sorry, I think I said the third party; I meant the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition does not support renewable energy, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Leader of the Opposition does not in fact acknowledge that there is a lot more we have to do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this province, and that the shutting down of the coal-fired plants was the single largest initiative that has been accomplished and completed in North America.

We are going to continue to work with the renewable industry—tens of thousands of jobs have been created—and we will continue to make sure that we have a clean electricity grid in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: This \$28-million payout may not be the last we've heard about this scandal. In fact, the tribunal that made the \$28-million ruling declared the contract is formally "in force" and has not been terminated by the Liberals. That's a \$5.2-billion contract—again, for energy we do not need.

Mr. Speaker, how will this government pay for this \$5.2-billion contract? Are ratepayers and taxpayers on the hook for a scandal that could be five times the size of the gas plants scandal? I would appreciate—no diversions, no talking points—a clear answer on this question about a \$5.2-billion mega scandal this government got themselves into again.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise to answer the Leader of the Opposition's question. As the Premier outlined, Ontario has been advised of the tribunal's decision in the NAFTA chapter 11 dispute. The tribunal dismissed the majority of claims, with the final \$25-million award being significantly less than the up to \$568 million in damages sought by Windstream.

I find it very interesting that this party, just a couple of weeks ago, was talking about ripping up contracts for renewable energy that would cost this province billions of dollars. But recognizing that their plan is not a plan—that they don't even have one—we eliminated coal. We've done the heavy lifting and we're very proud of our record.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. This morning, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce confirmed that life is harder under this Liberal

government. Some 38% of small businesses say hydro prices are the number one obstacle they face to remaining competitive in Ontario, and one in three small businesses has said hydro prices will lead to them delaying and cancelling investments and expansions.

This Premier and this government have lost touch with Main Street Ontario and the hard-working people who create jobs. How many more small businesses will have to close their doors before this Premier realizes her energy policies are reckless, out of touch and dangerous for Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Economic Development is eager to speak to this, but let me just say that we're very sympathetic to small businesses in the province. In fact, Mr. Speaker, you will know that in the throne speech, one of the prongs of our plan was to expand access to the Industrial Conservation Initiative to smaller businesses so that not only the 300 businesses had access—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —but another 1,000 businesses would have access.

The reality is that our economic growth across Ontario is outstripping that of other parts of the country and North America. In fact, almost all of the G7 countries did not see as high real GDP growth as Ontario did.

We are doing better. There are jobs being created in this province by the private sector, including by small businesses, because of the conditions that we are putting in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: It's not just mom-and-pop shops around Ontario that are having trouble. It's small business start-ups and companies hiring in the skilled trades.

The chamber of commerce released a fascinating stat that said that nearly 40% of employers are struggling to fill a job opening over the past year and a half because of the skills mismatch that we see in Ontario today, because a company couldn't find the right person for the right job with the right qualifications. For over 13 years, this government has done nothing to address the skills mismatch in the province of Ontario. The chamber of commerce has pointed it out very plainly: They can't fill 40% of those jobs because you're not producing young people down the educational pathways that will lead to a job.

Mr. Speaker, my question is, will the Liberals take this advice from the chamber of commerce? Will you deal with the skills mismatch in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, we don't only take the advice of our chamber of commerce very seriously; we've worked in partnership with that chamber for over a decade now to make Ontario the most generous place in North America when it comes to working with small business.

There is a reason why we're leading the G7 in growth. Part of that is because our small businesses, our start-ups, are excelling here. There's a reason why venture capital is up 251%: because they're investing in our talent.

Mr. Speaker, we're working very closely with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. They've written a report that completely aligns very much with the work we're doing. They praised us on some of the things we're doing to give our small businesses breaks on energy rates. We're going to keep working with them to build an economy that we'll be proud to pass on to our kids and grandkids.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I remind the member not to hold a prop, please.

Mr. Jim Wilson: He should read the prop.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not helpful at all.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier: To hear Liberal ministers say that the chamber of commerce report is aligned with the government—it was an indictment of the government. Have they not even read the report?

Since the minister hasn't read the report, I'll share with you right here in the Legislature exactly what the report said. It said that half of small businesses in Ontario feel that Ontario is worse off than it was five years ago—half of small businesses. Is it any wonder why they feel that way?

We're a province that is mired in over \$300 billion of debt, we have the second-highest tax burden in the country for businesses, we have grade 6 students failing in math, nearly 40% of businesses can't find a young person to fill the job that they need to hire, and this government thinks things are rosy? You are killing small businesses in this province.

My question is, rather than saying everything is rosy, will you listen to the chamber of commerce for once?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, nothing but rhetoric is coming from that Leader of the Opposition. You have no right to talk down the small business community that's seen as the best in all of North America. Our start-ups here in Ontario are the most sought-after start-ups anywhere in North America today, if not anywhere in the world.

When it comes to listening to our chamber, we've been listening. We continue to work in partnership with them. That's why—we had a capital tax in this province—in 2010, the capital tax was gone. That's why we lowered our corporate income tax down by 1%. Now a company in the US is paying 13% more in capital tax than our companies. That's why we set up a Southwestern Ontario Development Fund and an Eastern Ontario Development Fund. Some 32,000 people in this province are working because of that fund.

We will continue to work with our Ontario Chamber of Commerce. We will continue to reduce regulatory burden and be a global model for reducing regulatory burden, because we're determined to work—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Brad Duguid: —with our Ontario chamber to pass on—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Stop the clock. Minister, when I stand, you sit.

New question.

1050

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. Is the government planning to privatize eHealth and Ontario's digital health assets?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There is no possibility of the sale or the commercial use of people's health information. We've been very, very clear about that. The minister has said that. We're looking to improve the health care and service that patients receive as part of a digital strategy moving forward.

The Minister of Health wrote to Ed Clark seeking expert advice to assess the value of Ontario's digital health system and program: its assets and all the related intellectual property and the infrastructure in which we have invested over years.

I don't know if the member opposite knows, but the mandate of eHealth Ontario expires at the end of 2017. We believe that we've been presented with an opportunity to determine the result of the investments that have been made and to determine if there are changes that need to be made and what the value of those investments has produced.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: And yet the Minister of Health wrote to Ed Clark last week asking him to look at eHealth specifically because of his experience in valuing public and private assets.

Let's be honest: His experience in valuing public assets means selling public assets. After all, in 2014, when the Premier asked Mr. Clark to maximize the value of government business enterprises, we know that that was a public-relations-friendly way of saying, "Sell off Hydro One."

Is this Premier looking for a way to hide a Liberal plan to privatize digital health assets?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No. No, Mr. Speaker, and I will say that Canada Health Infoway has estimated roughly \$1 billion in annual benefits to Ontario as a result of the investments that have been made in eHealth Ontario and almost \$6 billion in cumulative benefits since 2007.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's true that the Minister of Health has asked Ed Clark, because of his experience, to do an assessment of the results of those investments. I think it's responsible, as eHealth reaches the end of its mandate in 2017, that we understand the value of those investments

and we look at whether there is a way to understand the value of those digital assets and move towards a new vision for digital health in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite lives in the Waterloo region. She knows how fast technology changes. She knows how important it is that we keep up and make the best decisions on this digital strategy. That's what this assessment is about.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The people in Waterloo region also know how high their energy costs are for sure, Premier.

On October 21, 2015, the Premier stood right there in her place and she said, "We're not selling off the assets." Less than a month later, Ed Clark said it was a "bold step" and showed "political courage" to sell Hydro One.

This is why people have a hard time believing that this Premier isn't planning to spring another fall surprise on the people of Ontario. Should Ontarians be getting ready for another Liberal sell-off?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No, Mr. Speaker. As I said, the Minister of Health has asked Ed Clark to do an assessment of eHealth Ontario in much the way—I will use the example of the LCBO, Mr. Speaker. Ed Clark did an assessment of the LCBO. There are changes that are being made to the liquor laws in this province. There are changes that have come about as a result of the work that Ed Clark did. But there is no sell-off of that asset.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're going to look at eHealth. We're going to look at the work that's been done and look at the investments that have been made and what the results are, and understand how we move forward to make sure that people in this province have the best digital health strategy possible. They deserve that. We need to keep up. We need to make sure that we leverage all of the technology that is available to people in the 21st century and make sure it works for the people of the province and their health care.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Ms. Catherine Fife: Again to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: There's a big difference between the LCBO and people's medical records in the province of Ontario.

It's not just New Democrats that have these concerns. On Thursday, the Ontario Medical Association wrote to Ed Clark, saying, "We are particularly concerned to read in media reports that the government may be seeking to monetize this data-gathering ability for profit."

Will the government rule out privatizing people's confidential medical records?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm very pleased. I saw the letter from Virginia Walley, and I'm very pleased that the OMA agrees with us that patient information is not and will not and never should be up for sale. I think that that's a fundamental and a given that we should all agree to in this House.

But at the same time, there has been a huge investment in e-health. We know, from an initial report from Canada

Health Infoway, that \$1 billion in annual benefits to Ontario as a result of the investments that have been made and almost \$6 billion in cumulative benefits since 2007—so we need to make sure that we understand the value of what has been produced because of those investments. We need to understand how we can move forward to provide the best digital health service, the best digital strategy for the people of Ontario. That's the work that we're doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: You cannot blame the people of this province for having serious trust issues when this government starts talking about privatization. It's not just New Democrats. It's also the Ontario Health Coalition that has concerns. After reading the minister's letter, the coalition said that they are "deeply concerned that the bias of this 'valuation' exercise will be towards for-profit privatization." They say, "The privatization of patient records puts the confidentiality of patient records in jeopardy of being compromised."

Will the government rule out privatization of medical records and not go back on your word later on?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I've done that. I have ruled that out. I've said that we agree with the member opposite, that patient information, people's health information, should never be compromised. We agree with the OMA that patient information should not be up for sale.

At the same time, there may be opportunities to partner or work with others in medical, hospital and related sectors to build on the assets that have been created by the investments that have been made by the people of Ontario and find ways to serve people and patients even better.

We have a minister in government, the Minister of Advanced Education, who has responsibility for a digital strategy government-wide. We want to make sure that everything we're doing in the health care sector provides the best digital strategy, the best digital service, and the most efficient one for the people of Ontario in their health care.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: This government also said that they would not sell off Hydro One, and they went ahead and did that as well.

It's not just doctors and the health coalition. Hospital workers say that "health records are confidential, containing information that should not be plucked for its potential asset value to the provincial Liberal government."

The Premier doesn't have a mandate to privatize health records from Ontarians. It's clear that doctors are worried, health care workers and advocates are worried, and hospital workers are worried, and they have good reason to be worried. Who has given this Premier a mandate to privatize digital health care in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister responsible for digital government.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me be abundantly clear: eHealth is not for sale. Personal health information is not and will not be for sale.

But let's take this opportunity to see the progress that has been made as a result of eHealth. A decade ago, only 770,000 Ontarians had access to EMRs; now it's over 10 million. Trauma patients have access to neurosurgery 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Telemedicine and remote clinical consultations are over half a million each year. People are getting the care they need where they live, not where the physician is, where the specialist is. And OLIS: almost three billion lab results for 9.5 million Ontarians.

E-health has made a profound difference in health care and we need to make sure we're doing it to its max.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Premier, but she may want to pass this on to the Minister of Infrastructure. That's because, on February 17, when I asked him about the lawsuit from Windstream, he said this: "The member opposite is assuming that the case has been lost. When the case has been determined, I'd be happy to answer the premise of his question."

Well, Speaker, the case has now been lost and the outcome determined, and the taxpayers will be on the hook for at least \$28 million. Windstream further claims that their \$500-million contract is still valid, and there's still another \$653-million lawsuit outstanding from Mesa Power.

1100

So I'll ask the same question again. We know the cancelled gas plants cost \$1.1 billion. Will the Premier admit that taxpayers may be on the hook for billions more because of her additional seat-saving Liberal energy fiascos?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and answer my honourable colleague's question. I think it's very important to say that Ontario is carefully reviewing the decision, and we understand that Canada is doing the same, in order to determine next steps.

So let's reiterate: We were advised last week of the tribunal's decision. The tribunal dismissed the majority of claims, with the final \$25-million award being significantly less than the up to \$568 million in damages sought by Windstream.

The decision to place a moratorium on offshore wind is one our government still believes is correct, and that's why we're going to continue to take a cautious approach to offshore wind, which includes finalizing research to make sure that we are protective of both human health and the environment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: The PC Party maintained there would never be offshore wind in the Great Lakes, and if

they had made that decision, you wouldn't be in the courts.

Once again, the Liberals irresponsibly tried to save seats in Scarborough and Kingston, and the taxpayers are left with the bill. When the final cost is eventually revealed, it is always much worse. Remember when cancelling the gas plants was only going to cost \$40 million, Speaker?

And then there's Trillium Power Wind Corp. A lawsuit is ongoing because the government once again deleted emails and destroyed evidence. That lawsuit, as a result of Liberals playing politics, is for \$2.25 billion.

We now know that the cancelled gas plants cost over a billion dollars. Will the Premier admit that Ontario taxpayers could be on the hook for billions more because of your energy mismanagement?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Again I'll reiterate: Ontario is carefully reviewing the decision, and we're working with the Canadian government in doing the same, to determine our next steps.

But the member from the opposition mentioned that they would have never invested in renewables. Exactly, Mr. Speaker. They would invest in coal. PC: "pro-coal" party. We eliminated coal. We've done the heavy lifting on this side, and we are very proud of that record.

We will continue to look at ways to actually save our ratepayers money. We did that by suspending the LRP II. This is something that this party doesn't have: a plan on energy. They have no idea.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. The United Way of Bruce Grey recently declared rural energy poverty to be a public health crisis. When rural families lose hydro, they not only lose their TV; they could lose their well pump, their drinking water, their toilet, the necessities of life.

The United Way found that in urban areas, the average hydro bill arrears is \$700, but in rural areas, the average arrears is over \$1,200. The maximum relief available to rural families who heat with electricity is just \$600.

Last month, the government promised rural rate relief, but we now know that most rural families will not get this relief. Will the government at least increase emergency assistance for rural families who face skyrocketing hydro bills?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and answer the question from the member from the third party. Rural rates are something we've identified as an issue because we've been hearing from Ontarians over the last several months. That's why we brought forward an increase to the RRRP in our speech from the throne. Some 330,000 families across the province will benefit from this. They will see a significant savings on top of their bill.

We also have six programs in place that will help these families. Specifically, seniors who live in rural areas, seniors who heat their homes with electricity, can see up to \$75 a month on top of the other programs that we have, and in addition to the 20% that they'll see in reduction through the RRRP.

We know this is an issue. We've identified it and acted on it very quickly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Premier: A family that heats with natural gas and is struggling to pay its energy bills can get up to \$500 to help pay their natural gas bill and they can get another \$500 to help pay their hydro bill. That's a total of \$1,000 in emergency assistance for struggling families living in areas with natural gas. But rural and northern families who do not have access to natural gas and must heat with electricity have access to a maximum of just \$600 in total emergency assistance.

Rural and northern families already have the highest energy bills in the province. Why is their total emergency assistance capped at \$400 less than what exists in urban areas?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'd like to thank the honourable member for pointing some of those facts out. It is important for me to say we're looking at every possible opportunity to help families right across the province. I should emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that there is the LEAP program that I believe he mentioned, the \$600 amount for helping families, but there is also, on the electricity side, up to \$75 a month for seniors and those who heat their homes with electricity, and that's most of those folks who live in northern and rural areas.

So when you add that all together, on top of a northern Ontario tax rebate program and eliminating the DRC, we've done a lot to ensure that we're helping families in rural and northern communities, but we'll make sure that we continue to look at ways that we can continue to help. That's been part of my mandate since I've taken over this portfolio over 120-some days ago now, Mr. Speaker, and we'll continue to find ways to help families right across the province.

WATER SUPPLY

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. Speaker, we know that water is a precious resource and Ontario is truly blessed with it. Over the summer, communities across the province experienced drought conditions and in some areas it was quite severe. It raises concerns about our water resources and water security.

Last month, the Premier and the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change announced that the government will be taking a closer look at water management across the province. This is an important issue for all Ontarians and we want to ensure that we address this by taking a rational, evidence-based approach and respond to community concerns.

Now, today, the announcement was made on the completion of that review. Speaker, could the minister please inform the House of the details of that announcement?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the member from Kitchener Centre because she played a very significant role in this. She comes from a water-stressed area of the province, as does the President of the Treasury Board, the member for Guelph. I also want to thank the Premier. When you want to do something, it's always helpful when the Premier directs you to do it—things move quite quickly, and only a couple of months after that direction, here we are with a moratorium for two years, Mr. Speaker, that will ensure that there are no new expansions and no new capacity increases while we review in detail to look at the issues that have arisen with climate change and other matters of local water security and concerns important to residents, our farm community and many of our businesses.

The rules will also be upgraded for existing water pumping, which will require greater scrutiny and greater science, and we will be reducing the permitting period from 10 to five years, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'd like to thank the minister. I know he cares passionately about this issue. Today's announcement clearly demonstrates that this government is committed to protecting the environment, specifically our groundwater resources. Ontario's drinking water continues to be among the best protected in North America. You can see this from our strict, health-based drinking water standards to comprehensive legislation that does protect water resources. There is a safety net that ensures the quality of our drinking water.

Today's announcement further safeguards this precious resource. Could the minister please offer more insights on today's announcement and also information on how we can encourage all Ontarians to choose tap water whenever possible, which is safe, reliable, cost-effective and convenient?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We should give a shout-out to our many municipalities and the OCWA water utility because we do have some of the best drinking water and the safest drinking water now in the world after many, many years. But we also have very inexpensive water, I'd say, Mr. Speaker. Right now it's some of the cheapest in the world. One of the things that we will be reviewing is the pricing system and the cost of that to better reflect that.

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We'll also be looking at ground source water as a particular challenge, because many people who use water take water out of the ground and don't put it back, where others do put it back.

We have to be very cognizant about the price and about the challenges in water-stressed areas, which much of the Guelph, Cambridge and Kitchener area is, to ensure that we have a higher standard and that our pricing system reflects conservation and fair cost recovery.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question today is for the Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Saturday's Toronto Sun featured an important story about manufacturers who have formed a coalition to stand up to this Liberal government's policies—policies which are putting good jobs at risk by making Ontario no longer viable for companies like theirs.

The Coalition of Concerned Manufacturers is growing rapidly and already represents thousands of good jobs across Ontario. Jocelyn Williams-Bamford of Automatic Coating, a founding member of the coalition, said, "We don't worry about our competition anymore. We fear the government."

How can the minister continue to support policies that have companies spending more resources fighting this government than growing their businesses and creating jobs in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, no government has ever supported our small business community more than this government has. Whether it be by helping them grow their businesses with supports that that party opposite does not support, whether it be by reducing regulatory burden, or whether it be by giving them breaks on their energy bills, we'll continue to work with that sector.

But I'll tell you something else we're doing that that party doesn't support: We're working with our auto sector in manufacturing to ensure that Oshawa has a future because of the partnerships that you do not support and we support. Brampton's FCA auto plant has a future because of the investments we're making in our auto sector—investments that that leader and that party call corporate welfare.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to keep investing with our manufacturing partners, we're going to keep growing this economy and we're going to keep leading this country in growth.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Minister of Economic Development and Growth. The Coalition of Concerned Manufacturers has a clear message for this government: "Better than giving us money would be policies that aren't bankrupting us."

This coalition, like thousands of businesses across the province, isn't looking for government handouts. They simply want policies that aren't designed to run them out of town.

The Liberal government has lost over 300,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs. Is it time to admit that this government's policies of expensive energy, over-regulation and high debt have led to hundreds of companies choosing to leave this province?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, the opposite is actually true. I was just at an investment mission in California. I met with eight companies. Four of them are coming here; four of them are making plans to come here in the very near future—eight for eight.

Mr. Speaker, they're coming here because we have better talent, because we've invested in our talent.

They're coming here because we have a lower cost for those companies to operate here, substantially lower—in some cases, 40% to 60% lower. They're coming here because we partner with our business community. Unlike the party opposite, we work in partnership with them—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Second time, member from Renfrew.

Finish, please.

Hon. Brad Duguid: That being said, Mr. Speaker, we will keep listening to our business community. We'll keep listening to our small businesses. We'll keep working in unison with them, and we will keep acting to make Ontario the most competitive place in North America to do business.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Later today, Ryerson University will release a study labelled A Public Health Crisis in the Making which reveals the devastating toll that temp agency work can take on workers. In some cases, after child care and deductions are paid to the temp agency, these employees make as little as \$3 an hour—\$3 an hour in 2016.

Speaker, will the Premier commit today to increase the province's minimum wage to \$15 an hour and ensure that part-time temporary agency workers receive the same pay for the same work that they often do while standing right next to other employees?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member for that question. It's a very important question because, certainly on this side of the House, we realize that employees deserve to be treated fairly at work and have the right to work in a safe workplace. We're committed, as a government, to ensuring the strongest protection for those workers.

We recognize—I think a number of people in this House have brought it up, saying that greater protection is something that we need to look at for those people who work at temporary help agencies. That's why we launched the Changing Workplaces Review: to do an in-depth examination of all the issues that are affecting Ontario's employees today as the economy is changing. We've been out consulting. We've consulted with business. We've consulted with labour. We've consulted with the advocacy groups.

I will tell you that last Friday was the last day for consultations. The interim report is out. Some of the recommendations have been outlined as options for the government. I suspect that we're going to see some good discussion on this and some much-needed change.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: New Democrats don't think that three out of every 10 workers in this province should have to struggle in conditions that one of the researchers called "modern-day slavery."

It's time to ensure that temporary workers earn the same wage as permanent workers. If you're doing the same work, you should get the same pay. People deserve to be able to plan for a future for their families and not have to compromise their well-being, and they deserve to know that there will be a future there for the next generation.

Will the Premier listen to the evidence and ensure that temporary and part-time workers in this province receive the same wage for the same work?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I want to thank the member again for the important question that he's just asked.

With the Changing Workplaces Review, we went out and we wanted to protect employees and we wanted to support Ontario business. I think that is something that anybody in this chamber would want.

We want to thank everybody from all the sectors of our society who have stepped forward and given us their best advice. It's reports just like the one the member has outlined—the one that has come out at Ryerson University—that demonstrate how important and how necessary it is that we do this in-depth examination.

As I said, the formal consultation ended last Friday, and people have stepped forward. We've heard from people from business, from labour, advocacy groups, large business and small business. The interim report is online. It remains available online.

We're looking forward to the recommendations and the type of input that's contained in the Ryerson report to move forward on this important issue.

POVERTY

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Today is the United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Today presents an opportunity to acknowledge the effort and struggle of people living in poverty, and a chance for them to make their concerns heard.

Hundreds of millions of people across the world still live in poverty. However, it is important for us to recognize that poverty does not just exist outside our borders. Hundreds of thousands of Canadians are also living in poverty.

I know that this government is committed to breaking the cycle of poverty for children and youth, helping people achieve employment and income security and ending chronic homelessness in Ontario.

Would the minister please inform the House on Ontario's progress in reducing poverty?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you to the member from Kingston and the Islands for the question. I am happy to rise today on behalf of the minister responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy to highlight a couple of examples of our progress.

In 2015, we indexed the Ontario Child Benefit to inflation. As a result, the maximum benefit rose to \$1,336 per child under 18, supporting nearly one million

children in more than 500,000 low-to-moderate-income families. Also, through the Healthy Smiles Ontario program, we are providing access to free preventive, routine and emergency dental services to over 300,000 low-income children and youth.

Of course, there's more work to be done, and we must continue to work with all of our partners, including businesses, communities, advocates and service delivery agencies, to find sustainable and meaningful ways to eradicate poverty.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Minister. I'm glad to hear of the progress that our government is making in reducing poverty in Ontario.

I understand that one of the four pillars of Ontario's new Poverty Reduction Strategy is investing in evidence-based programming. Through the Local Poverty Reduction Fund, our government is working with community partners to fund programs and interventions that work for people. In 2015 alone, Ontario invested \$12.6 million in 41 local projects in 20 communities. My community is one of those. We're seeing the results of these investments in our communities and just last week I had the opportunity to announce the CHPI investment at Home Base Housing of \$4,116,861.

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Can the minister please share with the House more information about the Local Poverty Reduction Fund?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: To support the Poverty Reduction Strategy's focus on evidence-based social policy, our government is investing \$50 million over six years towards the Local Poverty Reduction Fund. Grant recipients are required to evaluate the success of their programs.

One of the recipients of the fund last year was Food-share Toronto. This organization works with communities and schools to deliver healthy food and provide food education. Through their proposal, we will be able to determine whether these programs are improving access to fresh foods and whether they are helping families eat more healthfully. We know that it is more important than ever that we measure our results and invest in initiatives that work. Our government looks forward to announcing the 2016 grant recipients in the coming weeks.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is to the Premier. Last week, the Premier showed Ontarians just how out of touch she is at an event held by Niagara's chamber of commerce. The Premier had the audacity to call Ontarians "very bad actors" with regard to the environment.

If you ask me, Speaker, I think the Premier is a very bad actor herself when she pretends to care for Ontarians. Really and truly, all the Premier cares about is her cap-and-trade cash grab that will take more hard-earned dollars out of Ontarians' pockets so she can send those dollars to big business in California.

Will the Premier stand in this House and apologize to the people of Ontario for her inexcusable comments last week?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have said publicly at least twice that I shouldn't have used that language. I recognize that that language was taken in a way that I certainly did not intend.

Here's what I was saying. I was saying that we have a lot more to do as Ontarians, as Canadians, as people who live in a northern, industrialized country. We have a large carbon footprint. We've done a lot. Ontarians have led the way. We shut down all the coal-fired plants. We have a strong renewable industry. We have a 90% emissions-free electricity grid.

But what I was saying in that conversation was that there is more to do. We will continue to lead as Ontarians, and we are leading the country. Now we have a federal government that finally wants to work with us. Now Canadians can begin to lead as well.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the Premier: I did not hear an apology.

Life has gotten harder under the Premier's watch. Small businesses in Huron-Bruce are asking why they have to keep paying for the debt retirement charge until 2018, when the charge is finally off the residential bills. On top of that, consumers want transparency on their gas bills, to see the true cost of cap-and-trade, but unfortunately the Premier has chosen to bury that.

How dare the Premier arrogantly claim Ontarians are "bad actors" when this Premier's bad policies and wasteful spending continue to hurt their pocketbooks? Will the Premier do the honourable thing and apologize to the good people of Ontario for her disgraceful comments in the week of October—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I am very sorry that I used that language. I've said that a number of times. I shouldn't have used that language.

The point I was making is that as Ontarians, as Canadians, we have a lot to do. Our carbon footprint is large. And I was including myself in the notion that we, as Ontarians, living in a northern, developed country, have a large carbon footprint and we can't be complacent. Even though we, as the people of Ontario, have supported the shutdown of the coal-fired plants and have supported the renewable industry, we have more to do.

Mr. Speaker, what I would say to the party opposite is that I hope that they understand that working collectively, we all have a responsibility to lower our carbon footprint, to get rid of pollution and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, because the responsibility of this generation globally is to make sure we do what we can to make the globe—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question?

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Michael Mantha: Good morning to you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. People in the north use more hydro because they lack access to natural gas. They also pay some of the highest hydro rates. On top of this, now some families are getting hit with huge property tax assessment bills, with MPAC claiming that homes in places like Walkers Lake have somehow doubled or tripled in value in just the past four years.

I've heard from one senior on a fixed income whose property assessment has increased from under \$80,000 to over \$180,000. It doesn't make sense, Premier, and she can't afford it.

Will the Premier investigate these large MPAC reassessments in the north?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes, there have been other situations where there have been anomalous situations with MPAC. I know that there were issues around industrial rates. We will certainly look at this situation. I don't have all the details of what the member opposite is bringing forward, but I certainly will have a conversation with the Minister of Finance and we will look at what the situation is, absolutely.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Premier, these homes are not connected to municipal water or sewer services. These families have to drive their garbage to the dump. No northern realtor in their right mind would value these properties as MPAC has assessed them.

Large industrial property owners have lawyers and experts who can help manage and challenge MPAC assessments. But these families are not wealthy, they can't afford lawyers, and quite frankly, Premier, they're scared.

Will the government step in to help northern families who have been hit with these huge and unfair MPAC assessments?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said in the previous answer, we will absolutely look at this. I know that there have been situations where a systemic reassessment needed to happen. We will absolutely work with MPAC. The Minister of Finance will work with MPAC to determine exactly what's going on—whether this is anomalous, whether there needs to be a systemic solution to this.

We will follow up, and I hope that the member opposite will give the information that he has to the Minister of Finance.

ISLAMIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. There's a growing, vibrant Muslim community in my riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore that's contributing to our province's pros-

perity and growth. Over the years the Muslim Canadian community has added much richness to Ontario's cultural fabric, with many luminaries in the arts, culture, medicine and humanitarian areas who have been recognized through various honours, including our very own Order of Ontario, our highest honour.

On Thursday, October 6, all three parties came together in this House to pass an important piece of legislation that would recognize October as Islamic Heritage Month in Ontario. Can the minister share how the legislation will provide Ontarians the opportunity to celebrate important contributions of Canadians practising the Muslim faith?

Hon. Laura Albanese: I'd like to thank the dedicated MPP from Etobicoke-Lakeshore for his valuable question. Diversity has always played an important part in Ontario's culture and heritage, and our province is home for approximately 55% of the total people of Muslim faith in Canada.

In my riding of York South-Weston, I have the distinct honour to represent and serve a vibrant Muslim community alongside Ahmed Hussen, Canada's first-ever member of Parliament of Somali descent.

I enjoy a respectful and friendly relationship with many of my Muslim Canadian constituents and regularly participate in a number of events that are put on by the community and the local mosque. Most recently, for example, I had the honour to participate in a barbecue that was hosted by our local mosque, the Masjid-El-Noor mosque.

By proclaiming the month of October as Islamic Heritage Month, the province of Ontario recognizes—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Sorry. Supplementary.

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Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I thank the minister for her response. Our government is committed to educating Ontarians about the rich history, heritage and culture of Canadians of the Muslim faith, as well as other groups. However, systemic racism continues to create barriers that lead to unfair outcomes for racialized and indigenous people in Ontario. As Ontarians, we know that we've made a great deal of progress on diversity and inclusion, but we still have a lot to do before racialized groups are free to reach their full potential.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell us what the government is doing to address systemic racism, including islamophobia, across the province?

Hon. Laura Albanese: Once again I would like to thank the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore for his question. Mr. Speaker, I ask for your indulgence as I'm fighting a nasty cold, as you can hear.

Islamic Heritage Month is not only an opportunity to educate future generations about Ontario's rich history but also to combat islamophobia.

Recognizing that systemic racism continues to create barriers that lead to unfair outcomes for racialized and indigenous people in Ontario, our Premier appointed the honourable Michael Coteau as the minister responsible

for anti-racism. The directorate aims to increase public awareness of racism in order to create a more inclusive province and applies an anti-racism lens in developing, implementing and evaluating government policies, programs and services. Our government is strongly committed to addressing systemic racism and we believe that all Ontarians deserve to feel safe and secure so that they can reach their full potential.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mrs. Gila Martow: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Mr. Speaker, last Thursday a transport truck hit a guardrail on the westbound lanes of Highway 401, east of Toronto, at 4 o'clock in the morning. Thousands of morning commuters were stuck for hours behind the burning truck and its cargo. All express lanes were closed and did not reopen until 3 p.m. I think we can all agree that 11 hours to clear a vital artery is completely unacceptable.

Other major cities have a proper plan to clear their highways in order to minimize the devastating impact of lost revenue and secondary collisions. My private member's bill, the Highway Incident Management Act, addressed these concerns with full support from stakeholders at committee.

Will the minister please tell us how many more extended highway closures must occur before he will implement these expert recommendations?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the member from Thornhill for her question this morning. Also, of course, I know, as everyone in the House does, that this member brought forward a private member's bill on this general topic a number of months ago. I know there was discussion on that proposed legislation here in the House, Speaker, at all times.

This member would know, because she's heard me say it before, as everyone in the House has heard me say it before, that maintaining road and highway safety is perhaps—not perhaps; it is, in fact, the number one priority for Ontario's Ministry of Transportation. It is why we've worked so hard to make sure that over the last 13 years our province has been ranked first or second across North America for having highway safety and for having road safety.

But that doesn't mean we rest on our laurels. It doesn't mean we don't continue to look for ways to make sure that, at all times, those highways are performing as they should, keeping in mind that the safety of the travelling public is our number one priority.

I'd be happy to provide additional information in the follow-up question.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Gila Martow: We don't need additional information; we need to implement the task force.

Mr. Speaker, again to the minister: The minister was interviewed by Newstalk 1010 at lunchtime last Thursday and claimed he was doing "everything possible" to clear the road. Many hours later his quote was still being replayed, as though it was some part of a comedy skit.

The talk show host repeatedly asked why we are not moving forward to better use available technology while implementing a system similar to Florida's, where specialized teams are responsible for specific sections of the highway and are given only 90 minutes to clear the lanes.

Will the minister please admit that 11 hours to clear the lanes was completely unacceptable and agree to implement what has full support from the CAA, our first responders and the tow truck industry representatives? This would be a task force of experts to immediately work out a better plan to deal with disruptions of our vital arterial roads.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member for the follow-up question. What I didn't say in my original answer, which I want to emphasize now, is that the Ministry of Transportation works very closely with law enforcement on all of these matters, on all of these initiatives to make sure that we're able to reopen highways, roads etc. that might be affected by accidents.

I should point out that at all times, the Ministry of Transportation holds our first responders in the highest regard with respect to the work they do to make sure that we can reopen highways when it is safe.

I think for everyone in this House, including that member, the number one priority should be the safety of the travelling public. We don't make a unilateral decision at the ministry as to when a highway should reopen. We do that in consultation with the OPP because, of course, the OPP would be best positioned to let us know when it is most safe to reopen a highway.

Having said that, I'll take under advisement the message being delivered by the member today and will look forward to having continued discussions to make sure that we can maintain our priority on road safety and keep the highways moving.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Traffic on Hamilton-area highways is getting worse by the minute, leaving people with less and less time to spend with their families.

One of the worst pinch points is where the Red Hill Valley Parkway and the QEW meet. The province began studying solutions in 2007; a report has been on the minister's desk for years. Yet here we are, nine years later, and no action.

When will the province start its engine and make this a priority for residents and businesses in Hamilton and Niagara?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member from Hamilton for his question. Of course, at all times on this side of the House, making sure that we continue to invest significant amounts of money and resources in Ontario's highway infrastructure is something that's extremely important to me as minister and to everyone, again, on this side of the House.

I should point out that in 2016-17, thanks to the leadership of our Premier, we are investing just under \$3 billion across the province in highways and bridges. I will also point out that that number specifically includes about \$1.6 billion for highways in southern Ontario.

I am well aware of the challenges that are felt in Hamilton and throughout the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. I've heard that from a number of colleagues on this side of the House. We'll continue to work with the municipality, motorists and other commuters in that lovely part of the GTHA to make sure that we get it right. I suspect that we'll have updates coming relatively shortly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: There are houses going up all through eastern Stoney Creek and the Grimsby area. Traffic congestion is going to get worse.

The Red Hill Valley Parkway and the Lincoln M. Alexander Parkway are vital to both residents and businesses in the Hamilton area. Last Wednesday, Hamilton city council asked the province to get on with easing the congestion immediately. Will the minister finally commit to starting an environmental assessment for the widening of the QEW at the Freeman interchange to the Red Hill Valley Parkway?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member for the follow-up question. As I mentioned in my original answer, we'll continue to work with the municipality to make sure that we can get shovels in the ground when it is appropriate to do so.

I do want to take just a moment to point out and, I guess, to emphasize the ongoing extraordinary commitment that the Ontario government has, that our Premier has with respect to making sure we are supporting highway expansion, extensions and enhancements at the same as making sure we continue to invest in public transit.

In Hamilton specifically, that member would know we announced a number of months ago that we'll be extending GO service all the way to Niagara Falls, but in the interim we're going to be building a brand-new station in Stoney Creek, specifically in that member's riding. At the same time, he would be well aware of the fact that the province of Ontario is investing \$1 billion in Hamilton's LRT project.

All in all, we understand the challenges that are being felt in Hamilton—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. It's never too late—never too late.

PETER PRESTON

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Haldimand–Norfolk on a point of order.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Speaker, I regret to inform this Legislature that former parliamentarian MPP Peter Preston—he was elected in 1995—has passed away. Our

thoughts and prayers are with Peter's family and his many, many friends.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEEK

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: As we begin Local Government Week, I want to rise and commend all those in the municipal sector who work to provide the services that people rely on every day.

Across Ontario, municipalities will be holding events this week to educate people on municipal government and the important role they play. From the water we drink to the roads we depend on, the police that protect us, the places our children play and the planning that shapes our communities, municipal governments impact people's lives every day. This week is an opportunity to celebrate the thousands and thousands of people who work hard in the municipal sector to ensure that everyone can rely on those services. It's an opportunity to celebrate the thousands of elected officials who give their time to help build strong, healthy and vibrant communities.

We recognize that municipalities are a mature level of government and an important part of our democracy. We know they need a real partner in the provincial government, one who will listen to them and respect that each community has different needs. They need a partner who will provide the support and predictability that they need and that will work with them to reduce costs, rather than adding new burdens. We understand the challenges in delivering all the services that people depend on, and we understand that municipalities persevere because they know that their residents rely on them.

As we celebrate Local Government Week, I want to commend our municipal sector and thank them for everything they do.

EVENTS IN WINDSOR–TECUMSEH

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Good afternoon, Speaker. It's good to be back in this chamber after celebrating Thanksgiving with family and constituents in Windsor–Tecumseh. I have a lot to be thankful for. I celebrated 41 years of marriage with Gale last week. I say "celebrated," but I spent most of that morning in the dentist's chair having a root canal. Then, there was office work to be done in the constituency office.

Then, in the evening, we had a public meeting on hydro rates. I say "we," meaning the member for Essex, the member for Windsor West and I hosted the meeting. The former member for Trinity–Spadina, God bless, Rosario Marchese, explained how and why the rates are going up. Speaker, as you know, it all started with the

Conservatives, when they started to privatize Ontario Hydro, Hydro One. It's getting worse—much worse—under the Wynne Liberals. There is no end in sight. In fact, rates are going to go up again in the next two weeks.

We hosted another meeting last week. Dianne Saxe, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, came down and spoke to a large crowd about updating the Environmental Bill of Rights. That bill, as you know, Speaker, was brought in by Minister Bud Wildman in a former NDP government in 1993. The public has until November 8 to provide input into that update.

I'll leave you with this, Speaker. The Environmental Bill of Rights is based on a key insight: Decisions that affect the environment are just too important to leave entirely to government.

CYPRUS INDEPENDENCE DAY

Ms. Soo Wong: It is an honour for me to rise today to recognize the 56th anniversary of Cyprus's independence from Britain. The Legislature marked this celebration by raising the Cypriot flag at Queen's Park on October 6. There were many special guests at the celebration, including His Excellency Dr. Pavlos Anastasiades, the first High Commissioner of the Republic of Cyprus to Canada.

Cyprus is a small Mediterranean country of just over 9,000 square kilometres and has a population of almost 800,000 people. The friendship between Canada and the Republic of Cyprus goes back 52 years, when Cyprus asked the UN to create a peacekeeping force. Canada's peacekeeping operation in Cyprus, from 1964 to today, is one of Canada's longest and best-known overseas military commitments.

As we celebrate Cyprus Independence Day, we also need to remember the sacrifice of the 28 fallen Canadian peacekeepers who paid the ultimate price in our country's efforts to bring peace to Cyprus.

I'd like to thank Christine Amygdalidis, the president of the Cypriot Federation of Canada and a constituent in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, for organizing the October 6 celebration at Queen's Park and for continuing our 52 years of friendship between Canada and the Republic of Cyprus.

COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING

Mr. Jim McDonell: Since its first settlement in the early days of Canada, Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry has embodied a spirit of generosity and community involvement that continues to inspire acts of charity and advocacy for good causes at home and abroad.

Recently, three North Dundas residents ran to raise funds to fight diabetes in a half-marathon in Reykjavik, Iceland. Dawn Marquette, Cheryl Glazier and Trish Wouters joined more than 40 other Canadians in the Team Diabetes Canada delegation to the event, raising a combined total of \$215,000 for the cause.

Our international efforts don't stop with fundraising, though. David Merpaw is a local endurance athlete who combines his passion for swimming with his commitment to environmental advocacy by swimming long distances to raise awareness of river conservation. David swam the St. Lawrence River from Kingston to Montreal, the Ottawa River from Ottawa to Oka, and the Agusan River in the Philippines.

David's efforts were recently rewarded by the St. Lawrence River Institute through the 2016 River Award, a recognition of his valuable contribution to the St. Lawrence River, which forms the backbone of our historical and environmental heritage.

Wherever you go, residents of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry bring messages of hope, co-operation and good citizenship. They are an inspiration to us all and a reason for Ontario to be proud.

CHIC-A-PALOOZA

Mr. Michael Mantha: Guess what I was doing this weekend? I was at the Bruce Mines fairgrounds for Chic-a-Palooza 2016. This was one heck of an event. There was lots of clucking and lots of feathers flying and races going. But the one thing that was really amazing is how children can actually develop their own family values by caring for their beautiful chickens. And there are lots of different kinds of chickens.

The Youth Algoma Poultry Association had all kinds of activities with birds, crafts and crazy competitions, such as the best poultry art, the best feather arrangement, chicken races, pin the comb on the chicken, rooster crow, the largest egg and the smallest, most unusual and best-decorated egg. It was all over the place. It was fantastic.

Some of our winners: in the Silkie division, Miki; in the Ameraucana division, Hanna; in the Serama, Brianne; in the Orpington, Jacob. The talent show was amazing. It was a chicken with a pair of pants on. They had everybody there in stitches. That was Nathan. The MPP choice this year was Hailey, who won it.

All of this was going on while keeping in mind one of their very best community members, Teri Winter, who could not be there at that time, and who is here in Toronto. She's a little ill, under the weather, and I will be delivering a little gift to her later on.

Everybody had a fantastic time. If you've never been out to a Chic-a-Palooza event, I dare you to go.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members' statements? The member from Durham.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have other kinds of comments I won't make.

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DARLINGTON REFURBISHMENT PROJECT

Mr. Granville Anderson: On Friday, I was happy to join with the Minister of Energy to make an important

announcement about the Darlington refurbishment project that is currently under way this month in Clarington.

This \$12.8-billion project is expected to generate \$14.9 billion in economic benefits. It will create up to 11,800 jobs throughout the life of the project, many of those jobs being in my riding of Durham.

The impact on the local economy, both immediate and future, is massive. Beyond that, this 10-year project will mean that Darlington, which has an excellent reputation for producing safe, reliable power, will see its lifespan extended by about 30 years.

Ensuring we have clean, reliable and safely produced power is a huge component in our plan to build Ontario up. A great deal of work has gone into ensuring a supply of clean energy, negating the need for use of cheap, but dirty, coal.

Though we inherited a grid that was old and fragile, we have worked diligently to upgrade and maintain the system so that energy gets to where it's needed when it's needed.

I am so proud to represent an area in which some of that reliable, safe power is produced. I'm pleased to see us moving forward with a project that will help maintain our place as a contributor over the long term. I look forward to seeing this project completed—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

LUPUS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to rise today to highlight Lupus Awareness Month. This chronic disease causes inflammation in one or more body parts and can affect one in 1,000 Canadians. Lupus affects both men and women between the ages of 15 and 45. However, women are nine times more likely than men to develop the disease.

The cause of lupus is unknown. However, lupus does cause the immune system in the body to attack its own tissue, causing inflammation and a variety of symptoms. This disease is very hard to diagnose and it can affect people in many different ways with a wide range of symptoms.

Lupus can severely damage the joints, skin, kidneys, heart, lungs, blood vessels and the brain. Patients may experience joint pain, rashes, extreme fatigue, chest pain, weight gain, swelling of the feet, seizures and abnormalities in blood chemistry.

Although no cure is available for lupus, there are some medications and steroids that can be prescribed, along with a healthy lifestyle, that increase one's chances of a normal life expectancy. But lupus is difficult to recognize and diagnose, causing it to become life-threatening and life-altering.

I'd like to thank all health care professionals, Lupus Canada and Lupus Ontario for all their hard work in raising awareness regarding lupus and acting as resources to individuals and their families who are suffering from lupus.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Paul Miller: Over the last few weeks, I've heard from dozens if not hundreds of residents and businesses in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek who are suffering from and outraged by the rocketing costs of electricity in this province.

The people of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek are distraught when they open their hydro bills. They're calling on my office hour after hour with \$700, \$900, even \$1,100 or \$1,200 bills. Wages are not going up enough for families to afford this hit. Pensioners are cutting back on heat and air conditioning, even food, to make their hydro payments, at the same time as we export power at a loss to the United States.

Last week, I visited a small manufacturer in my riding who is being hurt severely by Ontario's soaring electricity rates. His hydro bill has jumped to almost \$7,000 a month. On Tuesday, I visited businesses in the Stoney Creek BIA. They complained about their hydro bills and the difficulty they are having absorbing increase after increase, year after year. It's relentless.

This government's failed energy policies are costing jobs in my riding, one by one at first, but much worse every time a business shuts shop entirely or moves to an affordable jurisdiction. This province needs a sustainable and affordable energy policy, and my constituents—all of our constituents—need real help now.

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: This past weekend, Queen's University in my riding of Kingston and the Islands celebrated its milestone 175th anniversary. On October 16, 1841, 26 years before our country was formed, Queen Victoria granted the royal charter to Queen's University.

This historic event was commemorated yesterday by the planting of a scarlet oak tree, which was so beautifully blessed by Mary Ann Spencer, the elder in residence at Four Directions.

With a legacy of shaping great thinkers, Queen's has become a central hub for research in this province. Researchers at this university spark and develop ideas that make an impact globally each and every year.

Many notable individuals, including the eighth Prime Minister of Canada, Sir Robert Borden; renowned engineer and inventor Sir Sandford Fleming; and the 2015 recipient of the Nobel Prize in physics, Arthur McDonald, have graced the halls at Queen's University.

Queen's is an integral part of the Kingston community, employing over 8,000 faculty and staff, and it has more than 22,000 students from more than 100 countries. It certainly holds a very special place in my heart, as two generations of Kiwala women have studied there.

Here's to another 175 years of Queen's outstanding performance and more outstanding medical research for the next 175 years so we can all see it and celebrate. Congratulations, Queen's University.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present a report on the Healthy Schools Strategy, section 4.03 of the 2015 annual report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Hardeman presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a short statement?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: As Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, today I'm pleased to table the committee's report entitled Healthy Schools Strategy Section 4.03 of the 2015 annual report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the permanent membership of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts: Lisa MacLeod, as Vice-Chair; John Fraser; Percy Hatfield; Monte Kwinter; Harinder Malhi; Peter Milczyn; Julia Munro; and Arthur Potts.

The committee extends its appreciation to officials from the Ministry of Education and from the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, the Trillium Lakelands District School Board and the York Catholic District School Board.

The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and report-writing deliberations by the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee and staff in the Legislative Research Service.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Hardeman moves adjournment of the debate.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT

(WASTE COLLECTION VEHICLES

AND SNOW PLOWS), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LE CODE
DE LA ROUTE (VÉHICULES DE COLLECTE
DES DÉCHETS ET CHASSE-NEIGE)

Mr. Harris moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 42, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to waste collection vehicles and snow plows / Projet de loi 42, Loi modifiant le Code de la route en ce qui concerne les véhicules de collecte des déchets et les chasse-neige.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Michael Harris: Today I introduce the Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Waste Collection Vehicles and Snow Plows), 2016, to extend the restrictions on approaching stopped emergency vehicles or tow trucks to vehicles in the course of collecting garbage or material for disposal or recycling, and road service vehicles that are used to plow, salt or de-ice a highway for snow or ice control.

PETITIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the price of electricity has skyrocketed under the Ontario Liberal government;

“Whereas ever-higher hydro bills are a huge concern for everyone in the province, especially seniors and others on fixed incomes, who can't afford to pay more;

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“Whereas Ontario's businesses say high electricity costs are making them uncompetitive, and have contributed to the loss of hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs;

“Whereas the recent Auditor General's report found Ontarians overpaid for electricity by \$37 billion over the past eight years and estimates that we will overpay by an additional \$133 billion over the next 18 years if nothing changes;

“Whereas the cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants costing \$1.1 billion, feed-in tariff (FIT) contracts with wind and solar companies, the sale of surplus energy to neighbouring jurisdictions at a loss, the debt retirement charge, the global adjustment and smart meters that haven't met their conservation targets have all put upward pressure on hydro bills;

“Whereas the sale of 60% of Hydro One is opposed by a majority of Ontarians and will likely only lead to even higher hydro bills;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To listen to Ontarians, reverse course on the Liberal government's current hydro policies and take immediate steps to stabilize hydro bills.”

I agree with this petition and have also affixed my signature to it.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that is titled “Hydro One Not for Sale!”

“Whereas the provincial government is creating a privatization scheme that will lead to higher hydro rates, lower reliability, and hundreds of millions less for our schools, roads, and hospitals; and

“Whereas the privatization scheme will be particularly harmful to northern and First Nations communities; and

“Whereas the provincial government is creating this privatization scheme under a veil of secrecy that means Ontarians don’t have a say on a change that will affect their lives dramatically; and

“Whereas it is not too late to cancel the scheme;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the province of Ontario immediately cancel its scheme to privatize Ontario’s Hydro One.”

I couldn’t agree more and will affix my signature and give it to page Carter to take to the table.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: “Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that community water fluoridation is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations, including the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Ontario Dental Association; and

“Whereas recent experience in Canadian cities that have removed fluoride from drinking water has led directly to a dramatic increase in tooth decay; and

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care urges support for amending the Fluoridation Act to ensure community water fluoridation is mandatory; and

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing urges support for the removal of provisions allowing Ontario municipalities to cease drinking water fluoridation, or fail to start drinking water fluoridation, from the Ontario Municipal Act;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Premier of Ontario direct the Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Health and Long-Term Care to amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario before the end of the first session of the current Ontario Parliament.”

I sign this petition and give it to page Samantha.

HYDRO RATES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member from Oxford and thank him for waiting.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have here a petition signed by a great many of my constituents. In fact, we had this petition lying on the counter in my office, and people were actually waiting in

line to sign it. We also posted it on the Internet. In the first eight hours, in fact, we have—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I’m glad to hear that, but I need you to read the petition.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Very good, Mr. Speaker, but I wanted to make sure that you understood the importance of this because this is the voice of the people of Oxford and the people of the province—of their concern. It is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the current Liberal government took office; and

“Whereas over half of Ontarians’ power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment; and

“Whereas the global adjustment is a tangible measure of how much Ontario must overpay for unneeded wind and solar power, and the cost of offloading excess power to our neighbours at a loss; and

“Whereas the energy policies of this Liberal government ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board and the Independent Electricity System Operator, and resulted in Ontarians’ electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province; and

“Whereas the implementation of cap-and-trade will drive the cost of electricity even higher and deny Ontarians the option to choose affordable natural gas heating; and

“Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians’ energy bills.”

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition and affix my signature. I hope the government is listening.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Privatizing Hydro One: Another Wrong Choice.

“Whereas once you privatize hydro, there’s no return; and

“We’ll lose billions in reliable annual revenues for schools and hospitals; and

“We’ll lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

“We’ll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what’s happened elsewhere;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come.”

Mr. Speaker, of course I support this petition, affix my name to it and will send it with page Suryakant.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas a staff report has recommended Upper Canada District School Board close numerous schools across eastern Ontario; and

“Whereas access to quality local education is essential for rural communities to thrive; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Education removed community impact considerations from pupil accommodation review guidelines in 2015; and

“Whereas local communities treasure their public schools and have been active participants in their continued operation, maintenance and success; and

“Whereas the Ontario government should focus on delivering quality, local education services to all communities, including rural Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“(1) To reinstate considerations of value to the local community and value to the local economy in pupil accommodation review guidelines; and

“(2) To work with all school boards, including Upper Canada District School Board, to prevent the closure of rural public schools.”

I agree with this and have over 2,000 signatures.

SHINGLES VACCINE

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the government of Ontario announced that starting September 15, 2016, the shingles vaccine would be available to all seniors 65 years to 70 years free of charge (until December 31, 2016, any senior born in 1945 is also eligible);

“Whereas seniors over the age of 70 years will still be required to pay for the vaccine if they choose;

“Whereas the government of Ontario claims that studies show that the vaccine is highly effective when seniors are vaccinated between the ages of 65 and 70 and will not cover the vaccine for all Ontario seniors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“This is unfair to seniors over the age of 70 and we urge the government to expand the coverage so that all Ontario seniors are eligible for the free shingles vaccine.”

I couldn't agree with this more. I'm going to affix my name to it and give to page Kepler to bring to the Clerk.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital is challenged to support the growing needs of the community within its existing space as it was built for a mere 7,000” emergency room “visits and experiences in excess of 33,000 visits annually; and

“Whereas the government-implemented Places to Grow Act forecasts massive population growth in New Tecumseth” and Alliston, “which along with the aging population will only intensify the need for the redevelopment of the hospital; and

“Whereas all other hospital emergency facilities are more than 45 minutes away with no public transit available between those communities; and

“Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital deserves equitable servicing comparable to other Ontario hospitals; 1330

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Kathleen Wynne Liberal government immediately provide the necessary funding to Stevenson Memorial Hospital for the redevelopment of their emergency department, operating rooms, diagnostic imaging and laboratory to ensure that they can continue to provide stable and ongoing service to residents in our area.”

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition entitled “Health Care You Can Count On.” It is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas for all Ontarians—no matter who they are, or where they live—the health of their family comes first, and it should come first for the government of Ontario, but unfortunately Liberal political self-interest comes first;

“Whereas 1,200 nurses have been fired since January 2015;

“Whereas hospital beds are being closed across Ontario; and

“Whereas hospital budgets have been frozen for four years, and increases this year will not keep up with inflation or a growing population;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Stop the Liberal cuts to hospitals, and ensure that, at a minimum, hospital funding keeps up with the growing costs of inflation and population growth, each and every year.”

I fully support this petition, affix my name to it and will give it to page Aaron to take to the table.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the current Liberal government took office;

“Whereas over half of Ontarians’ power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment;

“Whereas the global adjustment is a tangible measure of how much Ontario must overpay for unneeded wind and solar power, and the cost of offloading excess power to our neighbours at a loss;

“Whereas the market rate for electricity, according to IESO data, has been less than three cents per kilowatt hour to date in 2016, yet the Liberal government’s lack of responsible science-based planning has not allowed these reductions to be passed on to Ontarians, resulting in electrical bills several times more than that amount;

“Whereas the implementation of cap-and-trade will drive the cost of electricity even higher and deny Ontarians the option to choose affordable natural gas heating;

“Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills;

“Whereas the ill-conceived energy policies of this Liberal government that ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) and the independent electrical system operator (IESO), and are not based on science have resulted in Ontarians’ electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid for by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians’ energy bills.”

I agree with this and will pass it off to page Suryakant.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas a growing number of Ontarians are affected by the growth in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and insecure employment; and

“Whereas too many workers are unprotected by current minimum standards outlined in employment and labour laws; and

“Whereas the Ontario government is currently engaging in a public consultation to review and improve employment and labour laws in the province;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Implement a minimum wage of \$15 an hour.”

I couldn’t agree with this more. I’m going to affix my name to it and give it to page Catherine to bring to the Clerks’ table.

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Premier has admitted that she and all ministers have set quotas of funds they are required to raise for the Ontario Liberal Party;

“Whereas recent and repeated media stories have raised the public perception that ministers are meeting their fundraising quotas by soliciting donations from the companies and associations who have active files before their respective ministries;

“Whereas recent media stories have raised the public perception that decisions on government grants, contracts and policy changes are heavily influenced by the said donations;

“Whereas these perceptions of impropriety have shattered the public’s trust in this government;

“Whereas the people of Ontario deserve to know the truth about this” Liberal “government.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To call on the” Liberal “government to immediately call a commission of public inquiry to investigate how the” Liberal “government does business with donors to the Ontario Liberal Party.”

I agree with that and will be passing it off to page Carter.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have available for petitions this afternoon.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING STUDENTS ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 PROTÉGEANT LES ÉLÈVES

Ms. Hunter moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 37, An Act to amend the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007 and the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 37, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les éducatrices et les éducateurs de la petite enfance et la Loi de 1996 sur l’Ordre des enseignantes et des enseignants de l’Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Education to lead off the debate.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I am pleased to stand in the House today and speak in support of the Protecting Students Act which would, if passed, make important amendments to the Ontario College of Teachers Act.

I will be sharing my time with the Associate Minister of Education and the parliamentary assistant, the member from Durham.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the vast majority of Ontario teachers do an excellent job supporting our students. Last week, I spent the day touring schools along parts of

eastern Ontario, starting off in Kingston, with our Premier and our member from Kingston and the Islands, at Holy Cross. We then went on to Katarokwi Aboriginal School in Limestone District School Board. From there, I carried on to the provincial and demonstration schools in Belleville, to École secondaire publique Marc-Garneau in Trenton—

Hon. Jeff Leal: Great place.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Great place—and to Sherwood Public School in Oshawa.

I saw how hard our educators and school teams were working to ensure that each and every student under their care was being supported. Every day, these teachers work tirelessly inside and outside the classroom. They are dedicated to our students' success and are passionate advocates for their safety and security. It is because of their efforts that we have been so successful in our schools and have seen so much progress over the past 13 years.

I'd like to take this opportunity to share a few of those highlights.

The percentage of students in grades 3 and 6 who are meeting or exceeding the provincial standard in reading, writing and math has significantly increased since 2002-03.

In 2015-16, 71% of EQAO assessments of student performance in reading, writing and mathematics in grades 3 and 6 combined met or exceeded the provincial standard. This is an increase of 17 percentage points since 2002-03.

We're also seeing more students graduating from high school than ever before. Back in 2004, only 68% of high school students were graduating within five years. Today, 85.5% of our students are graduating within five years and moving on to their initial post-secondary destination, including apprenticeship training, college, community living, university or directly into the workforce.

This means that approximately 190,000 additional students have graduated than would have if the graduation rate had remained at the 2004 level. Students are entering a fast-paced global economy that is far more challenging and interconnected. That is why we need to support the development of a highly skilled workforce.

This is a shared responsibility, and we will work with our partners, including employers and educators, to help build a strong and dynamic workforce. Our progress is the result of a collective focus by our entire education system to pursue ambitious goals for our students.

This focus has formed the foundation for our renewed vision for education: Achieving Excellence. Achieving Excellence builds on the good work that we have done and establishes four ambitious goals: achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being, and enhancing public confidence. Mr. Speaker, we have been able to make significant progress on all these goals because of the commitment, professionalism and dedication of Ontario's teachers.

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Our teachers have also been instrumental as we implement new and exciting initiatives that will take our edu-

cation system to the next phase of student success. For example, all four- and five-year-olds now have access to full-day kindergarten, the most significant transformation in our education system in a generation. Since the program began, Ontario's full-day kindergarten program has enrolled more than one million students. This is an important milestone, and one that we are very proud of, as it is about investing in our earliest learners—the future of our province. About 260,000 four- and five-year-olds are benefiting from full-day kindergarten annually in approximately 3,600 schools across the province, saving families up to \$6,500 per child in child care costs.

Full-day kindergarten also makes it easier for parents to fully participate in the workforce, which helps increase opportunity and strengthen the economy. This innovative program features the expertise of both a teacher and an early childhood educator in the classroom. This unique program represents one of our biggest investments and one of the most significant transformations of our education system in a generation. We know that full-day kindergarten supports the continuum of learning and better prepares our children for grade 1. We know that success of full-day kindergarten can be attributed to the enthusiastic teachers who have embraced the goals of the program. They have worked tirelessly to prepare their classrooms to accommodate their young students throughout the day and they have worked closely with the early childhood educator in their classroom to build a cohesive and effective team environment.

The Protecting Students Act ensures our schools and learning environments remain a safe place for all students in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that everyone in this Legislature knows what kind of incredible influence a teacher can have in the lives of our children. In fact, I am sure everyone here today can recall a teacher of their own who was instrumental in their life and helped to put them on a path to success.

When I arrived to this country from Jamaica, it was cold. I was not used to bundling up every day. My kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Perden, created a warm and welcoming classroom for me and she taught me to store my coats and boots and hats and mittens in my cubby. Her classroom was a special place, a place where I felt safe and included.

A great teacher can make the words of a good book come to life. A great teacher can show you how an abstract math problem can have a real-world application. A great teacher can use inquiry to motivate a deaf child to learn to communicate in multiple languages and ignite a passion for learning. A great teacher can see the potential for success in every child.

Mr. Speaker, this describes the vast majority of teachers across Ontario. It is what sets our publicly funded education system apart from so many other jurisdictions. Whether our education sector thrives is based on the quality of our people, and we are privileged to have some of the best people right here in Ontario. Our teachers work hard every day supporting all of our students, including students from indigenous communities and students with special education needs.

Along with quality, dedicated teachers also ensure our students are able to learn in a safe and accepting environment. Students who feel safe, welcome and connected to school are more likely to succeed academically, and they cannot be expected to reach their full potential in a school environment where they feel intimidated. This is why we need the Protecting Students Act to become law.

As a citizen of Ontario and the Minister of Education, I want all children in Ontario to feel safe and protected when they walk through their school doors each and every morning. That is why our government has taken a number of steps to increase the safety and security of our students. For example, we introduced the Accepting Schools Act nearly four years ago. The act requires all school boards to take preventive measures against bullying, consider tougher consequences for bullying in certain circumstances, and support students who want to promote understanding and respect for all. But more than any other legal requirement, the legislation sends a strong message that respect and understanding for all students, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability or any other factor, are important components of a safe and inclusive school environment.

We were incredibly pleased as a government that so many teachers were some of the first people to be enthusiastic supporters of the Accepting Schools Act.

Mr. Speaker, we have had an ongoing commitment to student safety in Ontario. It is a commitment that continues through to today with the Protecting Students Act.

While we know that the vast majority of teachers are committed to the success and safety of their students, we need to ensure that in those rare circumstances when discipline is necessary, teachers, students, parents and administrators can count on a disciplinary system that is transparent, fair and effective.

The Ontario College of Teachers is an independent regulatory body that is responsible for regulating the teaching profession in Ontario, including disciplinary proceedings. These proposed changes would help give the college the tools it needs to ensure there is a transparent process in place when disciplinary action is required. It would also give the college an increased ability to protect our students when there may be an immediate danger to a student.

Most of the proposed changes in the bill reflect recommendations from a review of the college's investigation and disciplinary procedures conducted by the Honourable Justice Patrick LeSage. LeSage's report contained 49 recommendations to modernize the Ontario College of Teachers' investigation and disciplinary practices. Since the release of the report, our government has been working closely with the college to address all 49 recommendations. For example, back in January 2013 the college began posting the outcomes of disciplinary proceedings on their website to ensure these decisions were open and transparent to the public. We've continued to work with the college in other areas where they could take action to address the recommendations on their own.

I want to acknowledge the leadership at the college, not only for asking Justice LeSage to conduct the review,

but also for moving quickly to address his recommendations. However, while the government and the college have been working hard to address many of the recommendations, some of the recommendations require legislative changes. The Protecting Students Act would address the remaining recommendations. The proposed legislation and subsequent regulations in the Protecting Students Act, Bill 37, would improve the college's disciplinary processes, reduce the potential for conflicts of interest, and help increase the protection of our students.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the associate minister and the parliamentary assistant will go further into details about the legislation, but I want to take this opportunity to talk about a few key elements of the bill.

First, the legislation would, if passed, ensure that a teacher's certificate is automatically revoked if they have been found guilty of sexual abuse or acts relating to child pornography. This is an area where we are actually proposing stronger provisions than what Justice LeSage originally recommended. While Mr. LeSage did not recommend mandatory revocation of a certificate, we don't believe there is any reasonable circumstance where there is a confirmed case of sexual abuse or child pornography, where a teacher should be able to keep their teaching certificate.

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There's also a provision in the bill that would prevent an individual from reapplying to the college for a teaching certificate for five years if they have been found guilty of sexual abuse or child pornography. While someone could reapply after five years, there would have to be a public hearing of the discipline committee to determine whether or not their certificate should be reissued. In addition, a notation of every revocation of a certificate of registration is kept on the college's public register forever.

Mr. Speaker, the five-year time period is an increase compared to the minimum of one year as currently provided in the Ontario College of Teachers Act. The five-year time period is also consistent with other regulated professions in the health sector.

Another component of Bill 37 would allow the college to move swiftly and decisively if the college has reasonable grounds to believe that a child is at risk of harm or injury. If such a case arises, the college would have the ability to suspend a member's certificate and notify the school board immediately so as to limit the risk of the teacher remaining in the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, these are examples of the provisions in this bill that would improve the protection of our students and enhance the efficiency and transparency of Ontario College of Teachers disciplinary processes. These are processes that we know the vast majority of teachers will never experience, and only in rare circumstances do our teachers require disciplinary action. But in those rare cases where they do, there needs to be a process in place that is fair, effective and transparent. Teachers need to know that if there are allegations made against them, the discipline process will not drag on unnecessarily. And it

is important for parents to know that the college has taken swift and appropriate action when discipline is required, especially in cases involving sexual abuse or child pornography. By improving the disciplinary process for these rare circumstances, we can increase the already strong public confidence in the vast majority of teachers who dedicate their lives to helping our students succeed every day.

This proposed legislation, if passed, would strengthen the authority of the Ontario College of Teachers to take action, while ensuring the process is open and transparent for everyone involved.

Mr. Speaker, this is one more example of our commitment to improve student safety and well-being so our children have every opportunity to succeed.

I look forward to the support of all members of this Legislature on this very important piece of legislation.

Now I am pleased to have my colleague the Associate Minister of Education responsible for child care and early years, Indira Naidoo-Harris, speak to how the bill is aligned with our child care strategy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the Associate Minister of Education.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to thank the Minister of Education for sharing her time with me.

I'm pleased to stand today to support the proposed Protecting Students Act which is before the House. While the recommendations from Justice LeSage were directed at the Ontario College of Teachers, they were also applicable to the College of Early Childhood Educators, as their mandate is to govern and regulate early childhood educators. Therefore, amendments to the Early Childhood Educators Act were included under the Child Care Modernization Act to align with the anticipated amendments to the Ontario College of Teachers Act. The amendments to the Early Childhood Educators Act came into force in August 2015, and the College of Early Childhood Educators has already implemented these provisions under the act. Further amendments to the Early Childhood Educators Act have been introduced in this bill to ensure a more complete alignment with the proposed amendments to the Ontario College of Teachers Act.

If passed, the proposed legislation would ensure greater transparency, accountability and efficiency in the disciplinary practices at the Ontario College of Teachers and College of Early Childhood Educators, to increase public confidence and child and student safety. That's why we're here today and that's what we're here to talk about.

Our government is committed to providing a high-quality and accessible child care and early years program. The Child Care and Early Years Act provides a new legislative framework to support a more responsive, high-quality and accessible child care and early years system that will better serve Ontario's children and families. But it is not just about policy and legislation. We want to ensure that families have easy access to affordable and high-quality child care.

Mr. Speaker, every child deserves the best possible start in life, and it is our responsibility to make sure Ontario families have the right supports so children can grow and learn in a healthy environment. We want to make everyday life easier for families all across Ontario. We want to give more parents the choice: the choice about whether to stay home or to go to work, and the choice in terms of giving them peace of mind, having them know that their children are in a safe learning environment.

That's why we're creating 100,000 new child care spaces over the next five years across the province for our zero-to-four-year-olds. This is an historic investment, one that will transform the way we deliver child care in Ontario. This will help to meet the demands of a growing and changing province, and it will help more working families in Ontario to access quality, affordable care.

We know that today, approximately 20% of zero-to-four-year-olds in Ontario are in licensed child care, and it's estimated that demand is much higher. Our commitment is about adding another 100,000 spaces that will have a significant impact for these young children. In fact, it will double the number of spaces for this age group, providing access to 40% of Ontario children under the age of four, and it will help people in their everyday lives. It will help them by promoting early learning and development while helping more parents find the care they so urgently need.

We've heard from parents, we've heard from caregivers and families, and we've heard from our child care and early years partners. What we've heard is this: There are not enough licensed child care spaces for the parents, families and children who need them. That's why we are investing in our children's future and the future of Ontario.

I want to point out that our commitment to create 100,000 new spaces will result in school-based, community-based and home-based child care expansion across the province. Increasing the number of child care spaces will involve new construction as well as retrofitting existing excess space. We will work closely with our municipal partners to increase the number of spaces by looking at community and workplace settings.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that our plan to create 100,000 new child care spaces is just part of our long-term child care plan. Our government has been working very hard to modernize our child care and early years system. This is all part of our promise to students and parents that Ontario will continue to develop a world-class child care and early years system to match its world-class publicly funded education system.

Since 2003, our government has increased the number of licensed child care spaces in Ontario to almost 351,000. That's an increase of 87% over that time. In fact, in just the past three years alone, the number of licensed child care spaces has increased by more than 56,000 spaces. This increase is because we are committed to building a child care system that helps our children thrive and gives parents the support they need in their daily lives.

In April 2015, the province announced \$120 million spread over three years in new funding, dedicated to building safe, high-quality licensed child care spaces in schools across Ontario. Of this amount, \$113 million has been allocated, resulting in nearly 3,800 new licensed child care spaces coming soon to local communities in Ontario. This is great news, Mr. Speaker, and news that we can all be proud of.

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Since 2003, we have doubled child care funding to more than a billion dollars annually. That's a significant amount of money, but we're prepared to do more. This is an astounding investment in the future of our children and our province.

But it's not just about investments in child care spaces; it's also about investing in the people who work to provide high-quality, licensed child care programs in Ontario. I want to share with you some of the investments we have made in the people who support our children, the dedicated people who care for our kids and keep them happy, safe and healthy.

In 2016, Ontario is providing an additional \$1-per-hour wage increase for eligible child care workers who qualify in the licensed child care sector, bringing the total wage increase up to \$2 an hour, plus benefits, since January 2015. The province is also providing an additional \$10-a-day increase to home child care providers who qualify in 2016, bringing the total increase up to \$20 a day since January 2015.

Our Wage Enhancement Grant and Home Child Care Enhancement Grant for early childhood educators and other child care program staff will (1) help close the wage gap between registered early childhood educators working in full-day kindergarten programs and registered early childhood educators and child care professionals in licensed child care settings; (2) stabilize licensed child care operators by helping them retain registered early childhood educators and other child care program staff; and (3) support greater employment and income security.

To continue to build a high-quality, accessible child care system, we need to invest in the talented and dedicated people who make it the best system that it is. We not only need high-quality educators supporting our children, we also need positive learning environments that are safe for our children to grow. Families should have confidence in our child care and education systems. This bill is about ensuring that the integrity of the education and early childhood professions are upheld.

I would like to take a moment now to recognize the work of registered early childhood educators. Registered early childhood educators are trained professionals specializing in the early development and learning of children, and are registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators. They work directly with children in schools, in licensed child care settings and family support programs. They are the ones that we entrust our children with. They are the ones that we put our faith in. They are the ones on the front lines, shaping our kids and our future generations.

Registered early childhood educators have many important roles and duties. They are responsible for planning and leading activities to stimulate and develop the intellectual, physical and emotional social growth of our young children. Registered early childhood educators are dedicated to continuous professional learning to provide high-quality care and education for children and families.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I've been meeting with many early childhood educators over the last few weeks. I want to tell you that they are really dedicated to the children that they work with and to ensuring that they keep on top of some of the most significant pieces of research that are out there.

In addition to the amendments to align with the recommendations from Justice LeSage, we're modernizing our child care and early years system with strong policy work and a new legislative framework. Recently, we filed phase 2 regulations under the Child Care and Early Years Act, the groundbreaking legislation that took effect in August of last year. It ensures that families have increased access to safe and high-quality child care.

Some of these regulations have already taken effect, while others will come into force next year and beyond. One of the key regulatory changes that will take effect in September 2017 relates to the expansion of before- and after-school care. This change will be extended to children from six to 12 years old where there is sufficient demand from parents and families. Sometimes parents need to leave for work early in the morning, or they can't be there when the school bell rings at the end of the day. They need flexible hours, so this is an important step in increasing access for this much-needed care for kids, right up until age 12.

Another key priority for us is supporting First Nations, Métis and Inuit children in Ontario. Investing in early learning programs with indigenous partners is an important part of our commitment to families. In fact, this year alone, the ministry is providing \$27.7 million in child care funding to 77 of the 103 First Nation communities across Ontario. Ontario recognizes the value of culturally appropriate early years and child care programs in First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities.

As announced on May 30, we are also working with indigenous partners to increase the number of licensed child care spaces and culturally relevant programming off-reserve, and we are discussing with First Nation partners how to best expand child and family programs on-reserve and to make these important supports available in more communities. This is one of many steps in Ontario's journey of healing and reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

Part of our modernization of the early years system involved making everyday life easier for parents when it comes to child care. As of September 1 of this year, our government ended the practice of charging parents fees to be on waiting lists for licensed child care and home child care agencies. Parents said that this practice was—

Miss Monique Taylor: Speaker, a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Sorry, a point of order. The member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: I was just wondering if the associate minister was actually speaking to the bill that is before us today. I'm kind of confused on which legislation she is speaking to. If she could stick to today's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Of course, it is necessary that all the speeches be relevant to the bill at hand, and I believe the minister is, in fact, speaking to the bill.

I recognize, again, the Associate Minister of Education.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, this legislation applies to early childhood educators, and I think that it's important to talk about the work that they do and what this actually entails in terms of their work in the early childhood years.

Parents said that this practice was unfair and made their voices clear on this issue, when it came to charging fees for being on wait-lists. We listened to Ontario's parents and banned these unjustified fees, and we introduced changes that will require licensed child care providers to develop a public wait-list policy that clearly explains how children on a wait-list are offered admission. It's about transparency. Our government is listening and working to help parents with their child care needs.

The next steps in our transformation of Ontario's early years and child care system will not only benefit families now, but all of Ontario in the long term. We know that investing in child care supports women's empowerment and helps to reduce the gender wage gap. In fact, the number one recommendation from our recent gender wage gap consultation was to increase access to affordable, high-quality licensed child care—and we're responding.

Investing in child care also helps to reduce poverty. It also provides vital support for single parents and new immigrant families—all of which strengthens the Ontario economy.

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, we are building a child care and early years system that is high-quality, seamless and more accessible for Ontario's children and families. In addition to our investments, we are moving ahead with the creation of Ontario early years child and family centres. To do this, we are integrating existing child and family programs and transforming early years supports to better serve Ontario families and communities. The new centres will offer parents and children easy access to a host of high-quality core programs. These hubs will build on the successful work already taking place in many communities—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: A point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order. The member for Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Speaker, I don't believe that the member is actually talking to the bill. We're talking about a bill that is meant to address how indiscretions by teachers and within child care centres are reported to the

public. I think that by talking about the great things that the government is doing, she is not really addressing the bill of public reporting.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I've already ruled on this. I believe she is. It's an education bill, and her comments build on her argument in support of the bill. I find that the associate minister is speaking to the bill.

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Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for those comments.

These hubs are going to be key in our communities because they're going to build on the successful work already taking place in many Ontario communities across the province. We know that we cannot do this alone, and we will continue to work with our partners, especially our early childhood educators, and of course families, children and communities out there, to ensure that we meet the needs of local communities and maximize support for parents and our youngest learners.

We're proud of the work that we have done and we're excited about what is to come. We're continuing to transform the way our child care is delivered and are confident in our bold plan for Ontario's early years and child care system. We need a system that helps our children thrive and gives parents the support that they need. Working with our partners in the child care sector, this will involve a shift from legislative change to a future policy framework with four key pillars in mind. The pillars are access, parent choice and flexibility, affordability, and, of course, quality.

Our investments in child care priorities are about investing in the future. The work we are doing is incredibly exciting and is so important for Ontario families. We're building on the great work that we have done in a child's earliest years and right through their entire school career. We want to ensure that our students are successful so that they can grow and develop into confident, capable and caring citizens.

Our government must remain committed to improving public confidence in our early years and child education system and to protecting children and student safety. We're in the midst of one of the most significant transformations our child care and early years system has ever seen, all aimed at supporting the healthy development of our youngest learners.

I am confident that we are building a system that is high-quality, seamless and more accessible for Ontario's children and families.

I encourage the members of this House to support this important bill that will improve transparency and accountability in the public interest and will ensure that our children are safe.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the parliamentary assistant now outline some more specifics on this very important bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Durham.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to add my voice to those of the Minister of Education and the Associate Minister of Education in support of the Protecting Students Act.

Our teachers are professionals who are committed to the safety and success of their students. As the representatives of the government of Ontario, we too are committed to the safety and success of our children and students, and also our teachers.

As the government, we have the responsibility to introduce the Protecting Students Act. As the Minister of Education has so eloquently pointed out, this important legislation will improve the investigation and disciplinary processes of the Ontario College of Teachers. It will make the disciplinary process of Ontario educators clear and transparent. It will also reduce the potential for conflicts of interest. As the government, we would not be doing our due diligence if we did not recognize that sometimes there are complaints and that sometimes discipline is required for one reason or another. So for the very small percentage of teachers who require disciplinary action, we need to ensure a process that is conducted in a way that is respectful of our educators' rights and is also thorough and consistent.

Before the Honourable Patrick LeSage's recommendations were released in 2012, there was great scrutiny of the disciplinary practices of the college. At that time, in 2011, the college was criticized for not being transparent enough about disciplinary decisions and also for the substance of some of those decisions. At that time, the media reported that the Ontario College of Teachers was protecting the identity of teachers who were disciplined. They said that the disciplinary action was inconsistent and that the college was continuing to list those teachers in good standing on the public register.

This is why the college commissioned the Honourable Patrick LeSage to conduct an independent and comprehensive review of its disciplinary processes, including the publication of information relating to teachers' misconduct. His review concluded that the transparency and accountability of the college needed to be strengthened.

It was clear that we needed to give the college more tools to strengthen its disciplinary practices as well as open up those processes so they can be transparent to the public. That is why this bill is so important, and it will do just that, if passed. If passed, this bill will bring into law the obligation to publish details of these cases, including the outcomes and the names of teachers who are disciplined.

The recommended amendments demonstrate our government's ongoing commitment to improving public confidence in Ontario's education and early years systems and will go far to protect our students and children.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to touch on a few of the important elements in the bill as they relate to protecting our teachers.

If passed, the proposed act and subsequent regulations will help address any perception of conflict of interest at the college. Ontarians expect the college to govern the

teaching profession independently, because even the perception of a conflict of interest has the potential to erode some of that public confidence in our publicly funded education system.

Ensuring public confidence is one of the four goals of our government's renewed vision for education. It is something that we take very, very seriously, and so one way we protect our educators from the perception of conflict of interest is by restricting the ability of union officials to sit on the college's committee panels. The proposed bill would provide the regulatory authority for the college to implement this.

I want to emphasize that only a very small proportion of teachers are found guilty of offences requiring disciplinary action by the college. Our government accepts that LeSage's recommendations strike the right balance between student safety, increased transparency and accountability, and also increased efficiencies with the process.

We believe that our education partners agree that these recommendations are intended to only enhance and improve existing practices of the college.

The bill would also help improve communications between school boards and the college, particularly when a school board has restricted the duties of a teacher. If passed, the Protecting Students Act would also allow the college to share information with the school board if the subject of a complaint poses an immediate risk to a student.

If a complaint is made against a teacher by someone other than the school board, there is the risk that the board may not be aware of the complaint until the college has completed its investigation into the allegation. We think that this is too great a risk to take—Mr. Speaker, I have seen this first-hand, being a trustee with a school board—especially if the safety of a child is in question. By improving the communication between the college and the board, the school board can take the appropriate action locally to ensure student safety.

One example of this is that the proposed amendments indicate that certain acts of professional misconduct would result in a mandatory revocation of a member's licence. These include sexual acts or a prohibited act involving child pornography. And if a teacher's certificate were revoked for some form of sexual abuse or misconduct, the proposed amendments would mean that the individual in question would not be eligible to apply for reinstatement for a minimum of five years.

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There would also have to be a public hearing. Currently, a person who has had their certificate revoked may not apply for reinstatement for a term decided by the disciplinary committee or, if no term is set, for at least one year.

The act would also permit the college to disclose personal information to other regulatory agencies and to the police, to assist in their investigations. We think that this is a reasonable step that will ensure co-operation between agencies and better protection of the public.

Another way the act will improve transparency at the college is by publishing all decisions of the disciplinary committee on the college website. In cases where allegations have been determined to be unfounded, the teacher will have the option of including the decision in the college's official publication.

The proposed bill would also ensure that the college resolves cases more quickly and efficiently, while maintaining a rigorous investigation process. For example, the investigation committee would be expected to review and dispose of most matters in 120 days, while allowing for some flexibility to account for circumstances beyond the control of the committee.

Mr. Speaker, teachers, as well as parents and administrators, need to know that all complaints will be addressed in a timely manner. This provision will help the college avoid unnecessary delays in resolving cases.

I want to point out that the college council has agreed with all of the 49 recommendations from the LeSage report. They have also provided modifications to the recommendation that prohibits members of specific committees, including the investigation, discipline and fitness-to-practise committees, from holding an elected or appointed union or association position during their tenure on those committees. The modification states that the restrictions be applied to all council members, and that additional prohibited positions for appointed and elected positions with federations or professional associations include positions directly related to the protection of the profession, other than at the school level.

The college agrees that these recommendations need to be taken very seriously, and that incorporating them into law is a great way to enhance public confidence in our government and our publicly funded education system.

We also think it is important to recognize the distinct responsibilities of our principals and vice-principals, particularly in disciplinary proceedings, so the proposed bill would require that when hearing a matter relating to the conduct of a principal or vice-principal, an investigation or disciplinary panel include a principal or a vice-principal. We believe that it's reasonable to expect that if a principal or vice-principal is the subject of a complaint, part of the disciplinary panel will include someone who is familiar with the role of a principal or vice-principal and will be able to offer that important perspective during proceedings.

The bill will also provide greater clarity as to when the dispute resolution process should be used. Relatively minor complaints that might normally result in only a caution, reminder, advice or admonishment of the teacher could be directed to dispute resolution by the registrar of the college. This frees up more of the college's time and resources, allowing them to spend more time on more serious complaints, which would be sent through the normal investigation processes.

There would also be a greater clarity about when complaints could not go to dispute resolution, including cases of sexual abuse or child pornography. While all

disciplinary cases require an open, transparent investigation process, cases of this nature quite rightly require it even more.

Mr. Speaker, these are some of the key components of this bill that will improve the safety of our children and give the college the tools it needs for those rare circumstances when discipline is required. It is important for Ontario families to be confident that appropriate action has been taken in cases like these, and it is important for teachers to know there's a fair, transparent and effective process in place.

I believe the proposed provisions in this bill strike the right balance between student safety, increased transparency and accountability while improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the process used by the college now.

In certain places, our government's proposed approach goes further than the recommendation of the LeSage report. For example:

- recommending mandatory revocation of licences for specific acts of sexual abuse and acts related to child pornography;

- extending the mandatory revocation and reinstatement requirements to acts relating to children who are not students enrolled in school;

- extending to all employers of college members the requirement to report teacher professional misconduct to the college;

- adding a provision limiting the risk of a member remaining in direct contact with a student when a complaint is made by someone other than the employer, if there's a reasonable possibility of a child being at risk during an active investigation; and

- working with the council to develop regulatory provisions relating to holding positions with unions or associations, to be extended to all members of the college council and roster panellists and not only the elected council members on the committees for investigation, discipline and fitness to practise.

Mr. Speaker, I know we can all agree that Ontario's children are our most precious resource. Our schools must support safe and healthy learning environments where students can succeed and reach their full potential, and part of how we can ensure that these learning environments exist is by supporting the proposed Protecting Students Act.

I encourage all members of this House to support this very important bill.

Mr. Speaker, I know we can all agree that Ontario's children are our most precious resource. Our schools must support safe and healthy learning environments where students can succeed and reach their full potential. That's something that's very important.

This bill is here to protect students as well as teachers. As we all know, our teachers in Ontario have done a wonderful job in nurturing and preparing the proper learning environment for our students. That's not in question. We all support our teachers. Without good and fine teachers, some of us, or all of us, wouldn't be here in this Legislature today.

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But as we know, as in any profession, there are a few bad apples that surface once in a while, and we have to make sure that we protect the safety of our children. That's paramount. If one child happens to be in an unsafe environment or their rights aren't protected, that's one too many.

Mr. Speaker, I am supporting this bill. As a former school board trustee and as someone who considers himself somewhat of an advocate for the rights of children, I support this bill and I am looking forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: There's no question: People are very concerned about the safety of their children and obviously the threat of sexual abuse and child pornography. Within our communities, we see what I consider a good system, working through the OPP and parole officers. They all work together to shine a spotlight on offenders. They have systems in place of risk management, systems to monitor offenders and mitigate risk, but the concern obviously is in our schools and in our child care centres. It's long overdue for our child care system and our school system to get up to speed.

LeSage was well over four years ago. The questions are out there. I have a question presently: Are there convicted offenders with our kids now? The law hasn't passed. It has been debated, off and on, for the last several years. Are convicted offenders moving from board to board? Are they moving from school to school? Is someone fired and then they reapply somewhere else? This is permissible under the present law.

We know, based on the original legislation that was debated here, that the bill is now being amended to require a hearing if an offender wishes to be reinstated to again work with children. That was our objection to the previous legislation: Someone could be reinstated after something like five years, even though they were guilty as a convicted offender. Again, the question is raised—there would be a hearing. I'd like to know: What would be in place with respect to the membership of this hearing board? Would it have experts on sexual abuse or experts on child pornography to make these kinds of decisions on reinstatement?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a privilege for me to rise today to offer some comments in response to the speech from the Minister of Education, the Associate Minister of Education and the member for Durham.

As someone who participated in the hearings of the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment, some of the most profound, shocking and moving stories we heard were around childhood sexual abuse. This legislation reflects the reality that childhood sexual abuse is, in almost all cases, perpetrated by someone who is not a stranger to the child. Often it is a family member or a close family friend. It may be a father, an uncle—

someone who is within the child's intimate circle. Sometimes it's someone in a position of trust, like a Scout leader, a priest, sometimes a doctor and, as we are discussing here today, sometimes a teacher. It is important that we have legislative protections like this bill that we're talking about here today to help children heal from the abuse that they experience and to protect children from predatory conduct on behalf of any of these perpetrators.

This legislation is important to strengthen the disciplinary processes that are in place by the Ontario College of Teachers, and it is also important to ensure that children are protected in the future. I was a trustee in 2000 and was around when Justice Robins released his report and am glad to see that we're moving forward with this bill today. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I'm pleased that there seems to be a strong level of support in the Legislature for this very important legislation, and I want to compliment and thank the Minister of Education, the Associate Minister of Education and the member for Durham for their thoughtful comments. Clearly, protecting the safety of our children and students and maintaining the integrity of the teaching profession is a top priority—certainly for our government, as it should be for any government.

The Protecting Students Act, 2016, is very much the next step in our government's partnership with the Ontario College of Teachers to improve its teachers' discipline practices and processes.

We know that the vast majority of our teachers do an excellent job supporting our students—like so many others, I have incredibly fond memories of the important teachers in my life—but in rare circumstances where discipline is required, there must be a fair, transparent, decisive process that maintains the public interest and protects our children.

If this legislation is passed, it would make the Ontario College of Teachers' disciplinary processes more efficient; it would help better protect students and teachers; and it would reduce the potential for conflicts of interest. We view this as taking a very important step to make sure Ontario families continue to have the confidence that they need to have that their children are safe and protected in schools.

There's a lot that's being proposed in this legislation: requiring the publication of all decisions of the discipline committee on the Ontario College of Teachers website, and requiring the automatic revocation of a member's certificate by a discipline plan if a member is found guilty of sexual abuse or acts related to child pornography. There are many, many others. Again, I'm pleased that at the early start of this debate in the Legislature there seems to be a strong level of support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm pleased to rise and discuss Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act. This new

bill, tabled by the government, will ensure that a teacher's certificate is revoked if he or she has been found guilty of certain forms of sexual abuse or acts relating to child pornography. Sexual abuse and exploitation of children are unacceptable crimes on one of the most vulnerable populations in our society, and there should of course be zero tolerance for these types of acts.

My question would be to the minister or to the associate minister: Would there be a public website available for parents? One suggestion would be to create a public website that lists individuals who have had their certificate revoked for certain forms of sexual abuse or acts relating to child pornography. This would make it easier for parents across the province; they could simply go on a public website and determine which professionals have had their certificate revoked for sexual abuse. I think that would be something I'd like to see in this bill if it's not there currently.

Speaker, we obviously have an unequivocal responsibility as a society to protect our children and students. There's no place for child exploitation in this province—or any part of society, for that matter—and we expect all individuals, regardless of profession, who engage in this behaviour to be brought to justice.

I'd like to hear a response from the minister at some point about a possible public website for parents to find out this important information.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments.

I return to the member for Durham to reply.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members in this House for their comments and for their support of this very important bill.

This bill is not a partisan bill. It goes beyond partisan lines. It's in support of our children. We have to do what's best for them and make sure they have the ability to succeed in a safe, warm and welcoming environment.

As a trustee, I had numerous complaints from parents—some of it was legit; some of it is just parents expressing their concerns about their perceptions of what may have gone wrong with a particular teacher in a particular school. We take all of their concerns seriously.

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I reiterate, Mr. Speaker: It's about making our children have a supportive, safe and healthy environment in which they can learn and succeed and reach their full potential. This bill will go a long way to doing that. I'm sure this bill will go to committee and we will have submissions. No bill is perfect, but hopefully, with the co-operation of all three parties, we will get this one right, because we are doing this for the benefit of our children—by supporting the Protecting Students Act.

I encourage all members of this House, which they seem to be doing, to support this bill so we can have a comprehensive bill for the betterment of our students in all our schools in Ontario. I'm looking forward to further debate on this bill, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: As the official opposition critic for advanced education and skills development, I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the Legislature to speak to Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act.

Now, Speaker, within this discussion of the bill, it's useful to review as part of the context the Ontario College of Teachers' advisory on the subject of misconduct, including sexual improprieties. The intent of the advisory is to help members identify the legal, ethical and professional parameters that govern their behaviour and to prevent sexual abuse of students and sexual misconduct.

Generally, the term "sexual misconduct" is used in the advisory to refer to any behaviour of a sexual nature which may constitute professional misconduct. It is a wide net, Speaker, and it should be. It should be.

Written in 2002, it speaks to the point that sexual misconduct and abuse has gained greater public and professional scrutiny, not only in teaching, but also in other professions, particularly where people are in positions of trust and moral authority.

Members of the college are to demonstrate care for and commitment to students, looking out for their interests and reporting allegations of misconduct of a sexual nature. The advisory states that the relationships that teachers form with students are professional, and they must recognize the trust that the public places in them. They must respond professionally to victims' allegations by collaborating with other professionals charged with carrying out the investigation.

The advisory speaks to awareness of not only professional standards, but also other provincial legislation and regulations and the Criminal Code. A successful teaching career hinges on understanding the legal, ethical and professional parameters of behaviour. Ignorance of the legislative framework and the Criminal Code provisions provides no excuse.

The standards as outlined in the advisory state in no uncertain terms that engaging in sexual abuse of students or sexual misconduct is a form of professional misconduct and will lead to an investigation and disciplinary action. Teachers are cautioned that the consequences could indeed include suspension or revocation of a member's certificate of qualification. Further, the advisory states that professional misconduct of a sexual nature could involve a member's own students, other students or children, or even adults, if the discipline committee of the college "determines that the behaviour amounts to an act defined as professional misconduct."

Speaker, what's clear is that all of us should be aware that the behaviour demanded of teachers comes to them in very specific terminology in this advisory issued by the Ontario College of Teachers, their governing body. Teachers are encouraged specifically to avoid objectionable conduct or comments, whether or not the affected students appears to be offended by the comments; sexual harassment of non-students or co-workers; and threatened reprisals for rejecting sexual advances.

The advisory goes on to say that regardless of the age of the student and whether there are any criminal law

considerations, a member engaging in or attempting to establish a sexual relationship with a student is unacceptable. In fact, it states further that “any conduct directed to establishing such a relationship may constitute professional misconduct.”

Ensuring that the relationship remains professional rests completely with the teacher—completely with the teacher. As a consequence, the warnings in this advisory are wide-reaching and spare nothing in their descriptions, as they should. For example, the activities need not be overtly sexual but may nonetheless demean or cause embarrassment to a student based upon a student’s gender, race or sexual orientation.

Finally, I would quote from a paragraph of the advisory entitled, “Using Good Judgment.” It states, “Members understand that students depend on teachers to interpret what is right and wrong. This judgment can be difficult when certain acts seem innocent but may be considered later as a prelude to sexual abuse or sexual misconduct.”

Then there’s another group: all of us—the parents and grandparents. As parents, I feel that we are better equipped today to prepare our children and grandchildren for risks. We’re more informed and we have better tools with which to educate them. There is certainly a risk in instilling constant fear but, to be fair, we must deliver a message today that is more direct, powerful and meaningful than the one delivered by most parents of my generation.

Not only are teachers equipped with the tools necessary to effectively deal with the issues of morality, but parents are also given more effective means to address these issues with their children. It’s within this contextual backdrop that we examine the bill itself, fully equipped with the knowledge of the standards created by the teaching profession itself for its members. So we take a step back. Why do we need new legislation, and what is the genesis?

For me, one of the single most imperative functions of society is to protect the most vulnerable in our society. Our children are our future, and we must do all we can to make sure that they have a chance to grow and prosper, and to do so without fear of harm.

In 2011, the Toronto Star published a series of articles that looked into issues around the disciplinary measures taken by the Ontario College of Teachers. Specifically, they found that there was less and less transparency around how these issues were being dealt with. In the Star’s words, they found that, “more and more, the identity of bad teachers is being kept secret.” There was one case cited of a teacher who verbally assaulted students for five years before being caught. He received a three-month suspension and then was cleared to teach. If this was your son’s or daughter’s teacher, you’d have no idea that his or her conduct had been under investigation.

In its series, the Toronto Star cites many different examples of this type of behaviour and conduct, and in many cases the identity of the teacher who received discipline remained secret, and the way their case was

handled was done with little or no transparency. Of the 49 cases published in 2010, 35 did not identify the teacher.

Turning to August 2011, Patrick LeSage was retained by the Ontario College of Teachers to conduct a review into their intake, investigation and discipline procedures and practices. Further, he was also asked, more specifically, to examine and consider issues including communication and publication practices, impartiality and timeliness of adjudication, training and legal support, appropriateness of disciplinary outcomes, confidentiality and the handling of concerns about its members.

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Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act, seeks to amend the Ontario College of Teachers Act and the Early Childhood Educators Act in order to continue, as it should, to implement the recommendations stemming from the LeSage report, which was released in 2012.

The government is right to point out that the majority of the recommendations are made to the Ontario College of Teachers on how it conducts its affairs as the self-regulating body. However, there are still many recommendations that deal with legislative and regulatory matters that must be handled by the Ministry of Education.

This is the third time the Liberal government has brought forward this bill. When this bill was first introduced in 2013 as Bill 103, the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus did not feel it went far enough. At that time, my caucus offered support for the bill as a good first step, though we certainly felt that there were elements missing from the bill that needed to be entrenched in legislation.

Now, however, we’re pleased to see that Bill 37 will ensure that a teacher’s certificate is automatically revoked if he or she has been found guilty of certain forms of sexual abuse or acts related to child pornography. This addresses perhaps the most alarming of the outstanding recommendations in the LeSage report, recommendation 32, which stated, “The penalty for sexual abuse or sexual misconduct by a teacher involving a student should almost invariably be revocation of the member’s teaching certificate.”

Sexual abuse and exploitation of children are unacceptable crimes on one of the most vulnerable population in our society. There should be zero tolerance—zero tolerance—for these types of acts. There’s no place for child exploitation in this province, or any part of society for that matter, and we expect all individuals, regardless of their profession, who engage in this behaviour to be brought to justice.

But, despite some improvements reflected in Bill 37, the question arises: Why has it taken the government so long to move this file? The recommendations from the LeSage report were made four years ago, in 2012. While the Ontario College of Teachers has taken steps to address the recommendations aimed at them, what’s clear is that the government has introduced this bill three times and has gone no further. There have been three education

ministers since the LeSage report, and each tabled a bill which aims to address the recommendations. But at the end of the day, little concrete action has occurred since 2012.

As you read the LeSage report, the recommendations were pointed, and they were very concerning. Considering these recommendations were made more than four years ago, it's incumbent upon this government to take action to address them swiftly and appropriately.

I would like to go through some of the specific provisions of the bill at this time.

I feel there's often confusion in understanding the sanctions imposed through the workings of our criminal justice system and those imposed, for example, through the Ontario College of Teachers. The powers and duties of quasi-judicial bodies like the Ontario College of Teachers are too often blended with criminal proceedings, and this legislation, in my view, helps provide some needed clarity.

First and foremost, if there are proven allegations of guilt subsequent to the prosecution of a criminal case dealing with sexual abuse or child pornography, there's an automatic revocation of a member's certificate. The Ontario College of Teachers has no option, and I believe that this is the right step to take.

Second, in the past, a teacher could reapply to reacquire teaching status after one year from the date that the licence is revoked. Under the proposed legislative changes, when there has been a finding of sexual assault, the teacher cannot reapply for a period of five years. This step alone will serve to eliminate confusion for teachers, parents and everyone involved with our system of education. It turns tones of grey into more distinct shades of black and white.

Timeliness is also altered under the proposed bill, and it's important to understand what exists today and how it may change. Under the current Ontario College of Teachers guidelines, it attempts to have a complaint brought against a member within four months of it being reported. If it finds that the alleged misconduct warrants the "professional misconduct" label or an incompetence finding, then it refers the matter to a disciplinary panel. The hearings are quasi-judicial and could result in licence suspension or revocation.

But once the proposed bill is passed, this investigative process can be skipped altogether when there has already been a criminal connection to allegations that align with those before the Ontario College of Teachers.

There are currently teachers before the self-regulatory body's disciplinary committee. Of those accused, there are some who have been allegedly involved with physical contact with students. Before a case usually makes it to the college, school boards currently conduct their own investigations. It's important to note, though, that the boards also have their own disciplinary process, which could result in a teacher being suspended, returned to work or fired. Since the timelines of board and college investigations are different, a teacher could potentially be back at work or discharged by the time they're facing an Ontario College of Teachers hearing.

Speaker, it is our hope that the proposed legislation will eliminate duplication and help to streamline the process. It's not only critical for the victims and their families, but it's also important that the accused be treated with fairness in an open and transparent fashion.

But it's very important for all of us to recognize that in most cases, the accusations do not automatically lead to criminal charges or convictions. The standards established for appropriate conduct in a school setting may be distinct from those firmly set out in the Criminal Code of Canada. In other words, the bar may be lower in the school setting than it is for criminal prosecutions and convictions.

The goal is to protect students and, in so doing, to ensure that the established process is fair and transparent for all parties, including the accused. It's my understanding that the Ontario College of Teachers welcomes these changes in Bill 37: greater transparency in investigations and disciplinary matters, faster complaint resolution, and making the complaint process more accessible to the public.

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College CEO and registrar Michael Salvatori said, "We are committed to ensuring that our teachers are supporting the success and achievement of our students. And that is why we have been working with the government to strengthen the disciplinary processes at the college. In the rare cases where discipline is required, teachers, parents and students will know that a fair and transparent process will be in place."

The public needs to know that a process is in place that will create prompt reaction and resolution. They don't want to be kept in the dark. What's clear out of this discussion, Speaker, is we no longer live in 1968, a time when events like those we're discussing were kept in the dark or worse, not even recognized as conduct that was unbecoming or damaging. But we're in a new age, where information is available instantly, where sharing is seamless and where at last we have recognized the damaging impact of inappropriate conduct.

There is an awareness today that requires the action contemplated by Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act, and we cannot afford to wait any longer. Unless we are prepared as a society to constantly seek ways to improve our safeguards, then we are failing to exercise proper oversight.

Speaker, in preparing to speak to this bill this afternoon, I thought about my granddaughters and I asked myself, "What would I want to happen if they told me of an action by a teacher that appeared to be inappropriate, either through comment or physical contact?" For all of us, including me, this is a moment of extreme emotional intensity. My overriding concern would be that there was a system in place that would deal expeditiously with the matter, that I would have the opportunity to understand what was happening as the process played itself out, and that the penalties suited the offence. We owe it to all parents and students to have these protections in place, and we owe a duty to teachers too—of which my daughter is one.

Again, in my preparation for this statement, I also thought about the accused teacher, his or her parents or spouse or children. It's equally important that we improve the system by removing as much doubt as we possibly can. It should be equally fair to the accused, and by expediting procedures and better identifying penalties and timelines, we can ease the emotional strain.

It's easy to think about the trauma to the abused, but we should never forget to think about the trauma to the teacher who may have been wrongly accused of an event.

This bill is long overdue, and it's time that we helped safeguard those who are most vulnerable. This bill aims to address the remaining recommendations of the LeSage report from 2012, which made nearly 50 recommendations to the government and the Ontario College of Teachers over issues of transparency at the college.

To quote Mr. LeSage, "It has become clear to me that two primary challenges face the college: transparency and efficiency. Many of the issues raised with me during the consultations which I will address in this report can largely be resolved if transparency and efficiency become a focus of the college."

Further, the LeSage report talks about issues concerning lack of clarity around reporting and the triggers for doing so for the college. This is certainly something Bill 37 tries to rectify. Yet we're sitting here, four years after the recommendations from the LeSage report, and these challenges still exist. Certainly there needs to be more clarity enshrined in legislation and regulation.

Yes, Mr. LeSage made recommendations in 2012, and as I said at the outset of my remarks, we're on our third education minister and this bill is still at second reading. It's not as though the government is running up against resistance. We all understand, in this place, the need for these recommendations to be implemented, and now. The Ontario College of Teachers registrar said, "We are delighted to see the introduction of this bill as we are committed to the timely resolution of discipline matters and to timely public reporting."

Earlier this afternoon, across the aisle, my colleagues the Minister of Education, the Associate Minister of Education and the member for Durham spoke about the features of this particular bill. I listened carefully, very carefully, to what each had to say. I'm optimistic that this is an opportunity to see Bill 37 continue to make progress.

But, Speaker, at the end of the day, it's not just Bill 37. We've seen a number of bills reintroduced within the context of the throne speech and the government's claim to be seeking a new direction. But as I look at that order paper, it's essentially the same order paper that I viewed in May. What's clear in your review of that is that there's no coherent legislative agenda and certainly no cohesive direction.

Time and time again, we've seen this government create expert panels, or commence expert reports, only to commission further reports to examine the findings of the reports.

Speaker, at the end of last month, CityNews ran a segment asking the government what had happened with

the Protecting Students Act. The government's answer: to table the bill a week later in the exact same form as what had been tabled before the House was prorogued and we had the speech from the throne. We heard from the government in that story, the CityNews story, that they take this issue seriously and that it's a priority for this government.

When I contrast that particular statement with other examples, the Tony Dean report comes to mind. Buried deep within the halls of the advanced education and skills development ministry, one might wonder if we will ever hear what the government is going to do about the conclusions reached by Mr. Dean and how it will address the recommendations that are already in that report. But again, it begs the question as to whether the government commissions these reports with any intention of implementing the policy suggestions contained in the finished products.

Speaker, government is about priorities, and there is perhaps no better way to look at a government's priorities than by looking at what legislation it moves forward, and when and how, and what it chooses to leave on the order paper. We've seen little evidence of the new direction, so while I remain hopeful for Bill 37 and it being moved to a standing committee, the proof will be based on the government's actions.

I want to stress that I believe the overwhelming majority of teachers, including my daughter, are there to excel, to teach our next generation and to ensure that they're on the path to success. Teachers are entrusted to shape and mould the minds of tomorrow. They're called upon to go above and beyond for our children.

The American educator and author Peter Drucker said this when discussing the teaching profession: "Teaching is the only major occupation ... for which we have not yet developed tools to make an average person capable of competence and performance. In teaching, we rely on the 'naturals,' the ones who somehow know how to teach." Speaker, I like that quote because it speaks to the monumental task that teaching our future generation is, one of the highest callings in the entire public service.

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While we'll be supporting this bill as it moves to standing committee, we will continue to monitor and evaluate the bill as it moves to committee and to look, as appropriate, for proposed amendments where and if we feel that the bill can be strengthened.

Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to rise here in the Legislature as the official opposition critic for advanced education and skills development and debate Bill 37.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to be able to add my comments to the thoughtful remarks from our colleague from Whitby-Oshawa on Bill 37, Protecting Students Act. I'm very much also looking forward to our critic on the file weighing in and giving her hour lead on this bill.

It's important to have this fulsome conversation, especially when we're talking about our children. When we're talking about our students in our classrooms, in our schools, regardless of age, regardless of riding, we're talking about our children.

Certainly, as New Democrats we support much of what we heard from our colleague: that we are wanting to protect our students, we are wanting to protect their well-being, and we want to ensure that they have full access to a hopeful and meaningful future. When we find that there are egregious things happening in our schools, we absolutely want to ensure that that does not happen. We would like to get to the point where that cannot happen.

We definitely appreciate what the member was saying: that we're talking about our children, that they need to be safe and protected each and every day in our classrooms—recognizing, as he pointed out, that while this needs to be a strong piece of legislation, because this is a very strong and emotional topic, we need to ensure that as this moves forward, when it comes to protecting all involved, including the rights to fair process, all of that needs to be taken into consideration.

Our children are our most vulnerable. They have trusting relationships with those in their lives, whether it's teachers, family members or mentors in the community, and we need to ensure that those individuals are safe.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: It's always a pleasure to rise in the House and add a few comments to the debate on behalf of my constituents in Cambridge.

I wanted to use just a few seconds to thank the teachers in the province of Ontario. I've had six children in the school system, and I've always found that the teachers who have been dealing with my children and in my schools have been exemplary. They're succeeding in large part because of the teachers in Ontario. I just wanted to point that out.

I know that we've heard some thoughtful comments around the House this afternoon. I just wanted to make sure that we on this side of the House are looking to support Bill 37 in order to protect our children and to make sure that everybody who is dealing with our children is doing so in an environment that's safe for children.

This is the third time that it's been introduced. Following the release of the LeSage report, our government worked immediately with the Ontario College of Teachers to support the college's implementation of the recommendations that could be implemented without legislative amendments. Recommendations that deal primarily with internal OCT operations and procedures have already been implemented by the OCT through bylaw or policy, but there have been several recommendations that require statutory or regulatory amendments. In doing so, we want to make sure that we hear from all people in regard to this important thing about keeping our children safe.

I wanted to say one last thing, too: that while the LeSage review was under way, our government worked with the Ontario College of Teachers to bring greater transparency and confidence in the system.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm pleased to rise to speak and give my comments on the member from Whitby–Oshawa's wonderful presentation. I think he brought up some pretty good points. There's one I want to touch on. We've been talking about safety of our children, which certainly is paramount, from things that they have no control of.

I hope that this bill, if passed—there has to be some protection from those that are perceived or are accused of any crime that might have been committed here, too. I hope this doesn't end up in a witch hunt type of thing, and that whoever initiates the process for investigation does so in a very careful manner. There are stories of those being accused for the wrong reasons. I do hope that anyone who is involved with this enforcement of this type of thing takes that into consideration and makes sure the investigation is thorough before charges are laid or charges aren't laid.

I was talking to a police officer not too long ago about these very things. I met the officer and said, "How's it going? Are you busy?" He said, "Unfortunately, I am." He has a growth industry in the police service business. That's what he looks after. It's a growth industry. It affects all kinds of people, and people from all walks of life are involved on the wrong side of this type of thing.

I think this bill addresses some of the things that need to be addressed going forward, and I look forward to it in the committee process.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm happy to be able to stand to speak and to thank the member from Whitby–Oshawa for bringing his party's perspective on Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act. I just want to say that New Democrats support this bill. We will be working to ensure that it's tough, that it protects kids, that it provides a fair process for the accused when there's been misconduct and that it includes appropriate penalties for those found guilty of that misconduct.

There's a lot to be done to ensure that children in this province are safe at all times. We all entrust our children to go to school each and every day, and we know that teachers want to ensure that they are in a safe space also. No matter where you go in the world, you will always find a bad apple. It's unfortunate that sometimes we find those in our school system, because I know that the majority of teachers, just as well as the majority of people, try to do the best by people. It's unfortunate when something goes wrong, but we need to ensure that we have the procedures in place that will make sure that those people who have been accused, who have been found guilty of misconduct, are no longer in our school system and that our children can be sent to school safely.

I just want to quickly mention that during the government's lead on this bill, they found a lot of time to talk about other measures within the Education Act. I would have liked to hear more measures within the special education act. Since they had free time, they could have used it wisely.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments for this round. The member for Whitby-Oshawa can reply for the next two minutes.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased and I thank all the members from both the government side and the third party for their comments. It's been typical in my tenure here in the Legislature that they've been constructive. They've been speaking directly to some of the main aspects of my presentation, and that's mainly that the sexual abuse and exploitation of children is unacceptable. They're one of our most vulnerable populations in our society, and there should be zero tolerance.

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We've also spoken about the unequivocal responsibility as a society to protect our children and our students. This particular bill, as it's written and proposed, will certainly do that, taken together with the governing body—the Ontario teachers' college—as well. But what is also clear, within the process—and my colleague to my right has spoken to this—is that we're going to continue to monitor and evaluate the bill as it moves forward through the Legislature, hopefully passing second reading and into committee and clause-by-clause. Where amendments are necessary, in our view, particularly in the area of transparency and accountability, those particular amendments will be considered and discussed well within the committee and adopted by all parties because, at the end of the day, we're all working to protect our children and our students in the course of the particular framework of the bill but also the teachers who play such an important part in shaping and moulding the youth of our future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my pleasure to rise today on behalf of my constituents of Windsor West and as the education critic for the New Democratic caucus to speak to Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act.

Educators, school boards and principals have been anticipating this legislation for nearly five years, and I'm glad that it is finally before this chamber today. This legislation was first introduced as Bill 103 in 2013; then again in May 2016 as Bill 200, and, finally—oh, sorry—yes, as Bill 200; and, finally once again this fall, as it is before us as Bill 37.

New Democrats support this legislation and are glad to see this bill has once again been introduced in the Legislature. We will be working to ensure that it is tough, protects kids, provides a fair process for those accused of misconduct and includes appropriate penalties for those found guilty of misconduct. I'll be returning to these points throughout my time here today, Speaker.

Since this is the first day of debate on this legislation, I think it's important to highlight that the provisions in Bill 37 that talk about disciplinary actions for teachers' misconduct will really only be applied to a small minority of our educators. The vast majority of Ontario teachers do not see disciplinary action taken against them. The debate on this legislation is important and many of these precautions, protections and disciplinary actions are necessary, but at the outset of this debate, I would ask that members in this chamber refrain from judging or making generalizations about all teachers by the conduct of some.

In this province, we hold teachers to a very high standard, and, in almost all instances, teachers exceed our expectations each and every day. They are exemplary professionals who work tirelessly, both inside and outside the classroom, to deliver quality education and teach life skills to our next generation of leaders.

Teachers and all education workers are active members of our communities and often give back by organizing local food drives, breakfast programs and charity runs.

As the mother of two children, one a graduate of the public education system and one who is currently in high school, I have seen this dedication and commitment firsthand. From kindergarten to grade 12, teachers and education support staff shape our children into the curious, compassionate, generous and thought-provoking people they become, and for that, I want to personally say thank you.

Our teachers and all our education workers are some of the best advocates for quality education in Ontario. Whether it's the ongoing fight to reverse short-sighted cuts to education funding, forcing the government to keep the commitments it made on class sizes, or the ongoing efforts to improve health and safety, all education workers across Ontario are leaders in the struggle for quality education as well as a safe working and learning environment. We must remember this throughout the discussion on Bill 37.

Perhaps one of the most talked-about provisions of this legislation is the obligation of the college to revoke a teaching certificate when teachers are convicted of sexual abuse or child pornography. Currently, when teachers are found guilty of sexual abuse or child pornography, a discipline committee of the Ontario College of Teachers will typically revoke their teaching certificate, but it is not mandated to do so.

Moving forward, we must remember that it is only in the rarest of circumstances that members of the college will act in such a way as to cause their certificate to be revoked on these grounds. I cannot stress this enough. There is no question that children need to be protected from misconduct and abuse in schools, and I think the legislation before us today achieves this goal.

We all, whether MPPs, parents or teachers, recognize that we must have proper oversight and measures in place to ensure crimes are punished and kids are protected. New Democrats are committed to making every school in

Ontario safe for every child. We need to prevent bullying, misconduct and systemic problems that let kids fall behind.

This is an important bill and a very important discussion. It also allows us to consider other ways we can improve our schools through greater funding equity and more supports for teachers. For instance, while this government underfunds special education, all of those in the classroom suffer. Students are not given the opportunity to succeed. Some are even sent home because the school does not have the resources necessary to support students. Rather than providing education workers with the tools and resources they need to do their job effectively and safely, teachers are wearing Kevlar jackets and shin guards as a precaution against classroom disruptions.

For those who aren't aware of what Kevlar is, Kevlar is the same material that our police officers, our border agents, those within corrections—it's the same material that goes into the bulletproof vests that they wear on the front lines.

While we are glad to see legislation introduced today that works to protect students in areas of sexual assault and professional misconduct, more must be done to reduce bullying and in-classroom violence. These two are areas that must be improved upon, to protect everyone in the classroom. Requiring education workers—and that's important, because right now, they are required—to wear Kevlar is not a solution.

Speaker, we've heard stories about students who have been involved in a physical altercation through no fault of their own. We've had a special education student who has had something happen in order to trigger a behavioural incident, and other students within the classrooms or within the school are then triggered by that behaviour, and it adversely affects everybody in that school—not just the student who initially triggered, but all of those around them. Making our education workers wear Kevlar in the school system is not the answer to the problem. The government adequately funding a system so that students have the supports they need, so we don't see these behavioural issues—that's the solution, and that's the direction the government should be going in.

I'd like to commend all teachers, education workers, parents and families for their advocacy for and desire to have a system of special education supports for students based on individual student needs, not numbers, as we are currently seeing.

Speaker, we've seen that across the province, whether it's in our urban areas or in our rural areas, more and more boards are being forced to look at closing a great number of their schools rather than looking at how those schools service the community and service the children in that community. We've seen more and more schools laying off or firing the staff that would assist children with special education needs. In turn, that means that those left in the classroom with these students don't have the resources they need to be able to reach these individuals.

Now, one of the questions we must ask about this legislation is why it has taken so long to reach this stage of the legislative process. After all, the report that this legislation is based on was released in 2011, and the initial Protecting Students Act was brought forward in 2013. If this government truly believes that this legislation is necessary, why haven't they made it a priority over the past three years? Why was cancelling gas plant contracts more of a priority than passing the Protecting Students Act? Why was prorogation more of a priority than passing the Protecting Students Act, when it was before this chamber as Bill 200 just this spring? Speaker, at every turn, this government has shown that while they like to talk about what they are doing for parents, for students and education workers, they will always put their own interests first.

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As I have stated in the introduction, this bill has appeared before this chamber in various forms dating back to 2013. It actually predates my time as an MPP. In 2011, the Ontario College of Teachers appointed the Honourable Patrick LeSage to review its investigation and disciplinary procedures and dispute resolution program.

For some context, the College of Teachers officially opened on May 20, 1997. Prior to the establishment of the Ontario College of Teachers, the Minister of Education had the power to cancel or suspend a teacher's certificate. To guide and inform these decisions, the minister considered recommendations made by the relations and discipline committee of the Ontario Teachers' Federation, acting pursuant to the Teaching Profession Act. In part, this was a response to the 1994 report of the Royal Commission on Learning, *For the Love of Learning*. The report, in part, argued that the teaching profession should be self-regulating, similar to doctors, nurses and other professions.

On July 5, 1996, the Ontario College of Teachers Act was proclaimed into law and the college was created. The mandate for the college, as outlined in the act, was to license teachers in Ontario, set and maintain standards for the teaching profession, implement a disciplinary process, as well as accredit teacher education programs. Today, anyone teaching at a publicly funded school in Ontario must be a member in good standing of the college.

In general, the objectives of the college include:

- to regulate the profession of teaching and to govern its members;
- to develop, establish and maintain qualifications for membership in the college;
- to accredit professional teacher education programs and ongoing education programs offered by post-secondary educational institutions and other bodies;
- to issue, renew, amend, suspend, cancel, revoke and reinstate certificates of qualification and registration, including additional certificates for supervisory officers;
- to provide for the ongoing education of members of the college;

- to establish and enforce professional standards and ethical standards applicable to members of the college;
- to receive and investigate complaints against members of the college and to deal with discipline and fitness to practise issues; and
- to communicate with the public on behalf of the members of the college.

The full objectives of the college are outlined in the Ontario College of Teachers Act.

As I've stated earlier on, prior to the establishment of the college, the Ontario Teachers' Federation had a much larger role in disciplining and the revoking of teachers' certificates. That said, we still have an Ontario Teachers' Federation today. It seems necessary to further clarify the roles of the Ontario College of Teachers and the Ontario Teachers' Federation. We need to ensure that both are, at all times, acting within their established mandates. I'll return to this point later on.

Over the years, the college has conducted a number of reviews to determine how it is meeting these objectives and how it carries out its responsibilities. Often, these reviews are conducted by an independent expert and focus on various aspects of the college's mandate and practices. In 1999, the Honourable Sydney L. Robins, former judge for the Court of Appeal for Ontario, conducted a review, *Protecting Our Students*, following the conviction of a teacher in 1996 for sex crimes that spanned 20 years. The report stated that these crimes "represent the ultimate breach of the trust reposed in a teacher." It became clear that the educational system had failed its victims. Justice Robins made 101 recommendations to ensure that those crimes did not happen again. Those recommendations specifically addressed teacher-student sexual misconduct in the elementary and secondary school system.

Children are our most precious asset. Schools must provide a safe and welcome environment where our children can grow as learners and future leaders. As Justice Robins stated, "When a school environment is poisoned by sexual crimes or harassment, it is of fundamental concern to us all."

The report uncovered a reluctance on the part of teachers to report suspected misconduct by a colleague, a failure to act upon the disclosures of misconduct and the transfer of a suspected perpetrator from school to school. When the classroom environment is poisoned by sexual misconduct, the victims must have fair and transparent recourse. The issues raised in Justice Robins's report sparked the need for change in Ontario.

It would be very remiss of me not to again mention that these circumstances are very, very rare. To quote the Robins report directly: "The vast majority of teachers are unquestionably highly dedicated and caring professionals who seek to ensure a safe learning environment for their students. They are no doubt appalled by" improper conduct.

Speaker, I think that most of my colleagues in this caucus have heard stories about the things that teachers do above and beyond the school day. I recently heard a

story of a teacher from Toronto who helped his students put together an art installation for *Nuit Blanche*. Everybody from the area knows how difficult it is to get accepted to be an exhibitor. This particular teacher spent, I believe, 16 hours of his own time overnight. These installations are up overnight, so the teachers and the other artists camp out overnight with their art installations. This is outside of classroom time. This is not stuff that is funded through the ministry or through the school boards to the teachers. This is something done on their own time. There is also a cost to the teacher because the teacher then puts forward the money for the art supplies.

We've heard many other stories just recently, again, here in Toronto when the children returned to school in September and how hot it was in the classrooms because, as we know, many of the schools do not have adequate heating and cooling—and that's something I'll address later on in my comments. The students were actually getting to the point where they were so hot, they couldn't concentrate in the classroom. We've seen reports across the province where students were actually passing out in their classrooms.

This teacher went out and out of her own pocket spent \$500 in order to be able to put an air conditioner in a classroom so that her students could be comfortable and do what it is they came to school to do, which was to learn.

We have teachers who spend nights at home, when they should be spending time with their families, marking report cards, marking tests, preparing lessons for their students. Time and time again, we're hearing of more and more teachers who are spending their own time and their own money in order to provide our students with the education that they need and they deserve. That's not something they should have to be doing on their own. That's something that should be supported by the government, but unfortunately it's not.

Again, the disciplinary mechanisms that we are discussing today really only apply to a very small minority of educators. In 2000, the former government took steps to amend the Child and Family Services Act to require teachers to report all suspicions they have that a child is in need of protection.

On September 29, 2011, the *Toronto Star* reported that the Ontario College of Teachers was granting anonymity to teachers who pleaded guilty or no contest to certain allegations. Cases of misconduct ranged from helping students cheat on tests to inappropriate verbal ridicule to physical abuse and sexual misconduct.

The college was found to publish a summary of some cases on its website and in its newsletter without identifying the teacher. In other cases, no information was ever made public. The *Toronto Star* did not find that these instances were used in cases of criminal sexual assault but indicated that "they are still serious abuses of trust."

The use of teacher anonymity was growing. In 2008, there were 38 cases published; only five did not identify the teachers. In 2009, 43 cases were published; 20 did not

identify the teachers. In 2010, 49 cases were published; 35 did not identify the teachers. Ultimately, this led to widespread criticism of the college.

The Star investigation led the college to admit that there had been failings, stating, “We have not been as open and transparent as the public expects.” And, “If there are any flaws in our practices, we want to fix them.” Speaker, the public must have confidence in the college and in the disciplinary process for teachers’ misconduct.

In 2011, the college made the decision to review all practices and procedures related to the investigation and discipline mandate. To this end, former Chief Justice Patrick LeSage and K. Lynn Mahoney were commissioned to conduct this review. The report was completed and received in May 2012. Primarily, it focused on transparency and efficiency. In broad terms, these were the two main areas the college was asked to address.

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The final report contained 49 recommendations and ranged from amendments to provincial legislation to changing the college bylaws. According to the Ontario College of Teachers, the changes were designed to ensure that the college makes information about discipline hearings available sooner; reports discipline outcomes faster; shares more information with school boards, police and other regulators; and names all those found guilty of professional misconduct.

This legislation before us today, Bill 37, is meant to implement the recommendations outlined in the report. This legislation strengthens the process of charging and sentencing professionals with misconduct and does work to improve transparency. Students must be protected and families must have access to an accessible and transparent disciplinary process.

However, as I’ve stated in this chamber before, true transparency does not come at the expense of due process. The two principles can and do co-exist in many professional colleges. This is a model that we hope this legislation will achieve.

As legislators, I think it’s important that as we examine the legislation, we ensure it captures the spirit of the report’s recommendations and objectives. To do this, I think we first need to look at the recommendations individually. I’m going to go through some of the recommendations, and if I have time at the end, I’ll go back and talk about the ones that I hadn’t addressed already.

“Recommendation 1: The college should develop a communication strategy to increase public awareness of the college and its mandate. This would include explaining the distinction between its role and responsibility and that of school boards.

“Recommendation 2: Section 28.01 of the college’s bylaws requires a complaint to be in writing. The bylaw should be changed to accept complaints made in a form other than writing....

“Recommendation 3: To ensure consistency in reporting by school boards, the college must better define ‘restrictions on the member’s duties’ (section 43.2 of the

Ontario College of Teachers Act) which initiates the school board’s reporting obligation.

“Recommendation 4: Legislation should require the school board to provide the college with all relevant information relating to a complaint within a defined time frame.

“Recommendation 5: School boards should provide the member a copy of the reporting letter they send to the college pursuant to s. 43.2 and s. 43.3 of the Ontario College of Teachers Act. For public complaints, the college should advise the member as soon as practicable of the complaint. The member should be kept apprised of the status of the complaint and provided with an updated summary of all relevant information known to the college,” which is on page 26.

“Recommendation 6: The college should not grant members indeterminate time to reply to a complaint. The act should be amended to permit a maximum of 60 days to reply. The college should proceed if no response within the prescribed period,” which is on page 27.

“Recommendation 7: The college should only in exceptional circumstances place an investigation in hiatus pending criminal or children’s aid societies investigations. College investigations should only be put on hold if it is expedient and efficient, or if the police or children’s aid societies request the college to do so.

“Recommendation 8: There should be a legislated obligation for other public agencies to provide the college with a person’s record, if failure to disclose it is likely to cause the person or another person physical or emotional harm and the need for disclosure is urgent.

“Recommendation 9: The statutory duty of confidentiality in section 48 of the Ontario College of Teachers Act should be amended to permit disclosure to bodies that govern a profession inside or outside of Ontario, and a police officer to aid an investigation undertaken with a view to a law enforcement proceeding or from which a law enforcement proceeding is likely to result.

“Recommendation 10: There should be a greater mutual sharing of information between the college and school boards.

“Recommendation 11: Section 48 of the Ontario College of Teachers Act should be amended to permit the college to provide a member’s response to a complainant. A summary only of the response should be provided if the response would exacerbate the tension between the member and the complainant.”

I’m going to just flip through and skip through, because there are 49 recommendations here. As I said, I’ll go back to more if I have time at the end. Just bear with me, Speaker.

The success of this legislation can be evaluated by how well it reflects all of the recommendations that I just listed and those that I didn’t have an opportunity to. For the most part, this legislation does an adequate job of capturing the spirit of the LeSage report, with a few exceptions that I’m hopeful the government will clarify and possibly improve upon as this legislation continues throughout the legislative process.

The legislation before us today requires that all notices of hearings are published on the college's website. In particular, this bill amends subsection 23(2) of the Ontario College of Teachers Act by adding "for every hearing of the discipline committee, a notice of hearing and a notice of the day and time of the hearing, together with a link to the notices as published on the college's website."

While recommendation 29 of the report does state that "the notice of hearing must be posted on the college's website when it is served on the member," it's important to note that Justice LeSage saw the predicament of making a hearing public before the member is actually proven guilty of any transgression. The report states:

"The issue of posting a notice of hearing containing lengthy and specific allegations, which are later withdrawn or on which the member is found not guilty, troubles me. It is important that there be a public record of the discipline committee and the matters that are dealt with. It is equally important, in my view, that a member, who has been either found not guilty or has had allegations withdrawn, should not be required to continuously face a public record of allegations on which he/she has been cleared. I do not have an easy solution to the conundrum. Some members would say—there was a 'public record' of the allegations against me—there should also be a public record of the allegations having been withdrawn or dismissed by the discipline committee. There is also the problem, if no mention of the results is posted on the register, the public may continuously remain aware only of the allegations and not know the result or if the matter is still outstanding.

"I suggest this issue be resolved by discussions between counsel for the unions/association, who normally represent teachers/principals/vice-principals, and the college."

One of the questions we must consider as the bill continues through the legislative process is whether the conundrum, as Justice LeSage states, between the duty of the college to inform the public and respect for due process is adequately addressed by this legislation.

I would add that the proliferation of social media makes information that at one time may have been limited to the college's website more widely available as it is shared across social media platforms. I think everybody in this room who has ever been on one of the social media platforms, whether it's Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or whatever the case may be, sees how quickly information can travel, even if it's not proven information or factual information. Justice LeSage was concerned about how quickly information can spread and possibly affect a fair and due process for a member who would be accused of inappropriate behaviour.

Now, if public allegations outlined in a notice of hearing and the decision of the disciplinary committee were shared equally, this wouldn't necessarily be problematic. However, I would go so far as to speculate that more often than not, the notice of hearing will be shared more widely than the ultimate decision of the dis-

ciplinary committee, especially in cases where the member of the college is exonerated of the charges. We must also consider the time between the publication of the notice of hearing, any pre-hearing, the hearing and the ultimate decision. Some teachers' federations report that members can wait up to four years for hearings to be scheduled. Obviously this is too long and forces the educator to face accusations in public without being able to defend themselves in a reasonable length of time.

These concerns are compounded upon when the college withdraws the allegations in advance of the hearing. Justice LeSage noted an increase in withdrawn allegations after hearings were scheduled. From 1999 to 2001, only one such instance was recorded, while in 2011, 30% of all matters dealt with by the discipline committee resulted in notices of hearing withdrawals.

I think if we're going to publish notices of hearings online, we should take every reasonable precaution to ensure that these hearings will come to fruition. I would also argue that the recommendation to publish the notice of hearings is intended to inform the public about the hearing and increase public awareness about the hearing, rather than to inform the public of the merits of the allegation itself. These would be matters to be determined at the hearing.

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Justice LeSage references the importance of public participation when he states, "Currently, the hearing date and a summary of the allegations are posted 10 business days prior to a hearing. This is not sufficient. Interested parties, including the public, can only be informed as to when a matter will be heard if they check the website every single day. The notice of hearing must be posted when served on the member and the website must disclose each step of the process and be updated with every scheduling change."

In this paragraph, we can see that the intention of the recommendation to publish the notice of hearing on the website is to inform the public of when a hearing will take place, rather than informing the public on the merits of the allegation. This position is further expanded upon by Justice LeSage, who goes on to state that "the notice of hearing must contain a concise statement of the material facts and allegations, but not the evidence. The evidence is to be presented in a public forum where it will be heard and weighed by a trier of fact."

Here, the report cautions against any other body than the discipline committee as the trier of the facts. To this end, any evidence is meant to be examined in the appropriate venue and not the so-called court of public opinion. Publishing highly specific particulars in the notice of hearings may undermine the points raised by Justice LeSage. We need further clarification to ensure that the concerns with publishing the notices of hearings outlined by Justice LeSage are, in fact, remedied in this legislation.

We must also ensure that the language outlining the timeline to publish a notice of hearing is consistent with the language outlining the publication of a decision

and/or a withdrawal of a hearing. However, while the wording of this legislation stresses urgency when publishing a hearing on the college's website, that tone is not carried over and used when discussing the removal of the hearing from the site.

For instance, schedule 2 of the bill states, "The registrar shall post the notices and links referred to in clause (2)(b.3) on the register and on the college's website promptly after the notices are served upon the parties to the hearing, and may remove the information from the register after the proceeding has concluded."

Here, we can clearly see the double standard that exists in the present form of the bill. The word "promptly" is used in reference to posting a hearing on the college website, but the word "may" is used when discussing the removal of the information after the hearing has concluded.

Informing the public and impacted parties about disciplinary hearings is critical to maintaining public trust in the college. To do this, any notice of hearing must be removed when the hearing is concluded or withdrawn, so as not to misinform the public. Again, any notice of hearing must be removed when the hearing is concluded or withdrawn, so that we don't have misinformation out there for the public.

Speaker, as with the provisions around the publication and removal of the notice of hearing, we must ensure that the language describing the disclosure of information is consistent and clear. As in criminal proceedings, the investigation process of the college must include early and full disclosure of documents related to the hearing. This standard is set in both criminal and civil proceedings. Justice LeSage makes references to this in his report when he states, "Disclosure should occur as soon as possible, beginning at the investigation stage and continuing throughout so the member or, as is usually the case, member's counsel is made aware as soon as practicable what the member is facing or potentially facing. The earlier in the process full disclosure is made, the greater the likelihood that the matter will, in the public interest, proceed in an expedient and fair manner." If members of the college are better informed about the complaint against them, then they can give a more thoughtful and informed reply.

It's in society's best interests to ensure both sides of the complaint are fully informed, so long as doing so will not put either the complainant or person or body moving the complaint at risk of harm.

Bill 37, as currently written, may give the registrar discretion to provide only a summary of the complaint rather than the details required by the members of the college. This section can be clarified by the government and must ensure that members of the college are provided, to the fullest extent possible, information about the complaint brought against them.

Another aspect of this legislation that requires further clarification involves the publication of criminal proceedings of members of the college. This piece of the legislation is likely a response to recommendation 37 of the LeSage report, which again states:

"The college's legislation or bylaws should be amended to allow for the placement on the register of undertakings and information about the results of relevant criminal proceedings involving the member."

Here we see Justice LeSage express a clear binary: Either the legislation governing the college or its bylaws ought to be amended. I trust Justice LeSage would have stated that both should be amended if he believed that to be the case. The college has already amended their bylaws to implement recommendation 37 in 2012. If this amendment is already captured in a bylaw, why is the government including it in this legislation?

Bill 37 also amends the Ontario College of Teachers Act to require that the college post on the public register "information respecting any current or previous criminal proceedings involving a member that are relevant to his or her membership, including any undertakings of the member in relation to the proceeding."

While we can see how the public ought to know about criminal charges in areas that are relevant to the teaching profession, the language of this section of Bill 37 could be further clarified. This amendment seems to imply that any criminal proceedings are to be published on the public register. Any criminal proceeding could include criminal charges that have yet to be resolved in court. This information is already published to a large extent online through the Ontario court dates website, usually updated the day before a proceeding.

I'm glad to see that the current version of the legislation attempts to address this concern by making reference to the current or previous criminal proceedings that are no longer applicable or relevant to the member's membership. However, I still think a more robust explanation of relevant versus non-relevant criminal proceedings would be beneficial.

Furthermore, some clarification is required on the extent that previous criminal proceedings will be published. Will this provision be applied retroactively, meaning that the senior teacher who was involved in a criminal proceeding 20 years ago will now see these proceedings published on the public register? What about in instances where a pardon was granted? Is it fair to publish the proceedings even though a pardon was given? These questions largely remain unanswered, and I hope that throughout the course of the debate my colleagues across the floor can clarify these questions.

There is value in knowing the relevant criminal past of any educator. Teachers know that they are always on duty. The courts, including the Supreme Court, have made it clear that teachers are, in a sense, always role models, that they do not necessarily check their teaching hats at the schoolyard gate and may be perceived to be wearing their teacher hats even off-duty. But clarity is key. For instance, is a criminal conviction related to the possession of marijuana considered relevant under this act? What about after this government's federal counterpart honours its commitment to legalize the substance? Will it do more harm than good to publish a teacher's previous marijuana conviction when possession becomes legal in Canada?

Overall, we support this legislation. It's important and necessary. I hope this government will clarify the concerns that I'm raising today to ensure this legislation is as clear as possible as we move forward.

Another point I would like to raise fits with the theme of due process I was speaking of earlier when discussing the publication of notices and hearings. Recommendation 3 of the LeSage report states:

"To ensure consistency in reporting by school boards, the college must better define 'restrictions on the member's duties' ... which initiates the school board's reporting obligation."

Bill 37 attempts to implement this recommendation and adds clarity to the restrictions. The bill states:

"(a) restrictions on the age of students, grades or subjects that a member may teach or supervise;

"(b) restrictions on a member's eligibility to teach without supervision;

"(c) restrictions on a member's participation in or supervision of extracurricular activities;

"(d) restrictions on a member's assignment to duties that relate to teaching or education, which may be done by reassigning the member to duties that are not related to teaching or to education; and

"(e) any other restriction prescribed by the regulations....

"The requirement to report under subsections (1), (2) and (3) applies to all terminations, suspensions and restrictions imposed in the circumstances described in those subsections, regardless of the length or severity of the penalty.

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"For greater certainty, this section does not apply in the case of suspensions or restrictions imposed on a member's duties for reasons other than professional misconduct."

However, there may still be some unforeseen circumstances, most notably when a member of the college is assigned home with pay whilst an employer completes an investigation. This investigation may be related to matters of professional conduct, but the relieving of a member of his or her duties while an investigation is completed is not a punitive measure. The very fact that the member is sent home because of an investigation means that this is not a punitive measure. The investigation could very well exonerate a teacher and result in no discipline or restrictions.

Will these cases be reported to the college? If the government's answer is yes, I would ask how reporting these instances fulfills the intent of the LeSage report—due process must be respected.

Speaker, I've been speaking in great detail about the LeSage report, but there's an ongoing issue among stakeholders in education with respect to the Ontario College of Teachers.

If you recall, at the outset I listed the mandate of the Ontario College of Teachers as listed in the Ontario College of Teachers Act. In an effort to act on its legislated mandate, the college may, at times, encroach upon

the mandate of the Ontario Teachers' Federation or that of its affiliates. I think there is an opportunity to use Bill 37 to clarify the mandate of the Ontario College of Teachers as it relates to the Ontario Teachers' Federation and its affiliates. I hope the government will consider adding language to clarify the college's mandate, particularly around education of members and communication with the public.

I hope the members of the government here today will take these concerns seriously. This is necessary legislation, and I think that addressing these points I raised over the past few minutes will only improve this bill before it is enacted into law.

I'm relieved that this legislation includes a requirement that the registrar or deputy registrar understand French. In disciplinary proceedings, a grasp of language is fundamental to an interpretation of both facts and governing legislation. It is not enough for the most senior directors of the college to rely solely on translated material. A grasp of both French and English is critical to ensuring the successful implementation of Bill 37.

Les membres de l'Ordre des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'Ontario ont le droit d'utiliser le français durant la durée des procédures relatives aux mesures disciplinaires. Notre engagement envers ce droit linguistique est profond et non superficiel. L'exigence de cette loi stipule que les cadres supérieurs de l'Ordre des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'Ontario doivent comprendre le français et ainsi respecter l'apport des enseignants au sein des conseils scolaires de langue française partout dans la province.

The requirement for the registrar or a deputy registrar to be fluent in English and French is long overdue.

Unlike previous versions of this bill, the legislation before us today in Bill 37 also amends the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007. Overall, these changes make the ECE Act more consistent with the changes to the Ontario College of Teachers Act, also outlined in the legislation. I think this is an appropriate and obvious addition to the Protecting Students Act, and I'm glad to see it in Bill 37.

Speaker, I listened to the associate minister's comments on her government's commitments to child care as she spoke to the portion of the bill that amends the Early Childhood Educators Act. I would like to again thank all ECEs and child care workers in Ontario. I think it's important that we have a government that provides them with the tools they need to do their job effectively and to ensure Ontario families have access to robust, affordable child care.

While the minister spoke at length about changes that her government made to child care in Ontario, I must point out that the young families who could barely afford child care before this session started in September are still in the exact same predicament.

The throne speech to begin our new session of Parliament said nothing about making child care more affordable. When families cannot afford child care, every aspect of their lives becomes more difficult. Too many parents are forced to take on and carry huge credit card

debt. This is high-interest debt that they can't pay down. It makes it more difficult for families to save for a house or to move to a larger apartment to accommodate their new family. Today, thousands of parents in Ontario still cannot afford child care. As I've stated in this chamber before, child care spaces cannot be discussed in isolation of affordability and accountability.

We see this government talk over and over again—it's mentioned in this bill as well—about openness and transparency, about oversight, about how important it is for the public to know not only what the government is doing, but what every ministry within the government is doing. Yet we have seen that when the independent officers of this Legislature, such as the FAO, the Auditor General—the list goes on—bring forward concerns, specifically over the sell-off of our public hydro asset, where they've been actually telling the government that it's a bad move and they shouldn't go forward with it, this government, time and time again, has said, "We don't really respect your view, and we're just going to charge ahead and do what we want."

I really hope that while we're talking about a bill that's about openness and transparency and the public having very important information as it pertains to our educators—again, I want to point out that it is a very, very small portion of our educators who would ever fall within this legislation and do something that they really shouldn't do. While the government is expecting this kind of legislation for teachers and other education workers, I would expect that the government not just talk the talk, but walk the walk themselves and listen to our independent watchdogs, who time and time again advise them on what they should or should not be doing as it pertains to the best interests of people within Ontario.

Speaker, New Democrats think that it's time for this Protecting Students Act to become law. I think that a more rigid interpretation of the LeSage report will help clarify some of my concerns and work to strengthen this legislation as it continues to go through the legislative process.

Because the Minister of Education and the associate minister did spend a great deal of time, rather than specifically addressing the legislation before us and the very serious nature of it and actually taking the opportunity to recognize that not everybody in this province has time to sit at home and go through this proposed legislation word by word—there are many who may not understand what this means and would like to seek clarification. In the interest of the government being open and transparent with the people of Ontario, I really think that the minister, the associate minister and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education, instead of standing over there and singing their own praises, really could have spent the time discussing, like I did, the details of the bill: what's in place now and what this legislation would mean, not only to the parents and children in the province but to our educators. They could have taken the time to go through and explain to Ontarians what this legislation means. Instead, what they did was, they stood up and

they patted themselves on the back, campaigned from the other side of the room and talked about how wonderful they are.

So while they did that, I've gone through the bill at length, and I could do more. I could continue going through the recommendations. I believe there were another 37 recommendations I didn't read. The people at home are probably happy that I didn't. I'm sure that some of the people in this room are happy I didn't, but I would be happy to share with anybody who would like to see it. If there are people at home watching and they want more clarification on the bill, you can certainly contact my office. I will forward you a copy of my hour of debate here, including all of the recommendations, and take the time to go through.

Instead of finishing off the recommendations, I'd just like to address some of the things I heard from the Minister of Education, the Associate Minister of Education and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education. You would think that with the three of them working on the file, they would be getting things right; clearly, they're not. So I'm going to address some of the things they brought up, since they think they're doing such a wonderful job with our education system.

They talked about test scores and how test scores have gone up. That's fantastic. When students do well, I think what the government should be doing is standing up and applauding the educators and education workers who are working in the system with the students—with very limited resources, I might add—and doing the best job that they possibly can. So when students succeed, I think the government should be spending more time applauding those in the education system for the work that they're doing rather than applauding themselves and patting themselves on the back.

1610

Year after year, the Liberals claim to be investing in education, but year after year, what we see is a government not spending dedicated education dollars. Over the past three years, the government has not spent money that they've allocated for the education system—but have chosen not to spend. They've not spent more than \$1 billion, so when it comes to actually investing in education, the Liberals are falling short. That is money that could have gone back into the classrooms, to actually serve the students and the education workers that this legislation is addressing.

When we're talking about protecting students, one of the best ways to protect students is to make sure they have the resources they need in the schools and in the classrooms, in order to be able to concentrate on the task at hand and receive the education they need. That is more specifically, if you will, to students with special education needs. We see more and more students with special education needs who are not getting what they need, and some will act out. You'll see behavioural issues. That's certainly not a way that we want to be protecting students. We want to protect them by giving them everything they need to be safe at school and to succeed.

Families understand that Liberal cuts to education will mean fewer supports for students, as I just pointed out. There will be more layoffs and even more school closures across the province. Up in Sudbury, up north, the public school board up there is actually facing a closure of 25% of their schools. That's huge. In my area, we've seen school closure after school closure after school closure. We're seeing it across the province. Although they would like to put it on trustees and say that it's the trustees that decide to close the schools, ultimately it's this government that forces the trustees to close the schools because of lack of funding. So although they're talking about investing in education, when they're talking about investing in education, they need to actually be investing in schools. That would be a great start.

The Premier promised not to cut education, but she has clearly broken that promise to families. In fact, families in Windsor and Essex county and across this province are mobilizing, and they're actually planning a rally to come to Queen's Park and let the government know exactly how they feel about the fact that their good community schools are being closed and that their students are not receiving the supports they need when in a classroom.

At a time when we should be investing in students' future, the Liberals are cutting critical programming and forcing students to pay the price. Twenty-five school boards received less funding under the Special Education Grant, totalling more than \$8 million. So I would suggest that rather than cutting \$8 million specifically from special education and choosing not to spend a billion dollars on education—a billion dollars you promised to spend—and rather than making school boards choose to have to take a portion of their already tight and stretched budgets and spending that on Kevlar vests, shin guards and protection by armed guards for teachers and other educational support staff, rather than forcing boards to do that, you should actually take the money you promised to invest, take that \$8 million that was earmarked for special education, and actually put it into the system so that our teachers and our support staff don't have to wear the equivalent of bulletproof vests in the classroom. While you're protecting the education workers, you would also be protecting the students, because as you're giving them more and more supports in the classrooms, you'll find that those behavioural issues will start to subside, because especially students with special education needs would be getting the support they need, rather than struggling.

Speaker, in Toronto alone, boards will be dealing with more than a \$2-million shortfall in their budgets. Schools across the province are crumbling, and they've reached a tipping point. The Ontario Auditor General said that more than \$14 billion is currently needed to repair our schools, which means investing \$1.4 billion per year for the next 10 years.

Now, I'm sure that once the public really lets that sink in, that our schools are in need of \$14 billion in repairs,

going into an election, the government will probably promise that they're going to forward that money, and they'll probably say they'll do it over the next five years so that they'll have to get re-elected to do that. That's a little trick they like to do on the other side of the room.

As I pointed out earlier, classrooms are sweltering in the summer, which is why we found a teacher who took money out of her own pocket to put an air conditioner in her classroom so that students were not passing out and were not preoccupied with being hot in a sweltering classroom and were actually able to concentrate on the education that they need and they deserve.

In the wintertime, we're finding that students are having to put coats on in their classrooms. Students should not have to wear their winter coat in the classroom. It certainly doesn't help them learn when they're cold.

New Democrats believe that all children deserve a high-quality education. They should be able to go to schools that are properly maintained, safe and offer good learning environments, where students can actually focus on learning.

While the Auditor General says that more than \$14 billion is needed in school repairs—and, as I pointed out, that's \$1.4 billion per year for the next 10 years—there are independent community groups that have done the math and put that number closer to \$15 billion. This total—this is important to point out—doesn't include future upkeep and renewal needs. This is only addressing what the schools need and the boards need as of right now. If they were to forward the \$14 billion to \$15 billion right now and the boards could fix everything that they need to fix, this wouldn't address the future needs for next year, the year after or five years, 10 years down the road.

In June, the government announced \$1.1 billion over a two-year period for school repairs—\$1.1 billion over two years for school repairs. This announcement fell short of what was needed based on what the Auditor General called for. But, as I pointed out, when we're talking about openness and transparency and public accountability, the government talks a good talk but they don't necessarily walk the walk. When the Auditor General comes out and says, "This is what's going on: Our schools are in a state of disrepair. We're at a tipping point here and you need to do something," the government just says, "We're doing a wonderful job actually. We've invested all kinds of money into the education system. They're doing just fine. They don't really need any extra help."

As I pointed out, the government has closed hundreds of good neighbourhood schools over the past decade. Now the government is actually fast-tracking the process to close schools and limiting community input. That's interesting because as they travel around while they're in committee and they discuss things with the public and they get public input and really take that to heart, they've actually fast-tracked the process so that when it comes to facing school closures in their own community, in their own neighbourhoods, we have citizens who now have

less input into that process. How can the government say that they welcome more input but then create a process that invites less input and limits input?

They talk about being focused on community hubs, but instead they're limiting community participation and clearing the way for even more school closures. Decisions about local schools must always be made with the best interests of each child and the community as a whole. It cannot solely be based on dollars and cents.

School closures can't be forced on communities to meet the minister's bottom line. As I pointed out, there was \$1 billion that was promised for the education sector that wasn't forwarded. That's money that they could have put in to keeping schools open so that school boards have an opportunity to seek community partnerships and keep the schools open.

The revised guidelines for the public accommodation reviews were released on March 26, 2015, at the same time as the 2015-16 Grants for Student Needs. As I pointed out, in those new public accommodation review guidelines, the government has taken away community input on closures of schools. I don't think that anybody in the community who has faced a closure of their neighbourhood school appreciated or expected the government to limit their voice. They certainly want to be able to have as much opportunity as reasonably possible to have a say on what it means to their children and to their community to have their school closed. Basically, the government has said, "We don't really want to hear that. We're going to cut off input on that." We see that here in debate, when they try to shut down debate all the time.

When it comes to rural schools—like any community school, but especially rural schools—the government has to recognize that schools are more than just bricks and mortar.

1620

As I said, up Sudbury way, the public board there is looking at closing—25% of their school inventory is under the threat of closure because of the lack of funding from the ministry and the lack of foresight, or insight, from the government to recognize that when you close all these rural schools, these students are then put on buses—sometimes for an hour each way—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Or more.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: —or more, in some cases—to go to school and then to return home afterwards. I don't know any child—especially the youngest learners—who is going to be able to spend that much time on a bus, go into a classroom and be able to focus. I don't know how any educator, as wonderful as they all are, and the incredible work they do with the very limited tools that they are given—how anybody could reach a child at that age and really get through, have a breakthrough, and educate them when they've spent that much time on a school bus. They're either going to be tired by the time they get there, or they're going to be bursting with energy and wanting to be outside, running around, not sitting still in a classroom.

Speaker, in the 30 seconds that I have left—I have a list of things that the government is not doing right, but I

don't have the time, so I just want to make clear that we do support this legislation for a more transparent and a more fair process both for any educator who is accused of wrongdoing and for those who are found not guilty, to have their due process and have the public be aware of the decision. Whether they are found guilty or not guilty, we want the whole process to be fair.

I'm looking forward to this going to committee and having the government listen, for a change, and make some of the recommended changes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'd like to thank the member for Windsor West for her comments today on Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act. I actually agree with her on a number of points that she made today. As a parent of three children—they're all in their 20s now, but over the years, through elementary and high school, they had the benefit of excellent, selfless teachers who taught them very well. I think that we are truly blessed in the province of Ontario to have one of the best education systems in this country and, I will say, in this world.

I also agree with her, when it comes to so-called problem teachers, that we're talking about a very small minority of educators. We agree that all students in Ontario should be protected, and we agree that the process of administering discipline, when required, should be fair and transparent. Our responsibility is to protect kids in this province.

But, Speaker, when it comes to the welfare of children and the record of the NDP, it's important to note these facts: The NDP voted against investing in child care. The NDP voted against giving early childhood educators a raise of \$2 per hour. The NDP voted against our measure to provide more than \$11 billion over the next 10 years for school repairs and building new schools. I heard the member saying she was in favour of this. Why did they vote against our bill? In the last election, the NDP promised to slash \$600 million from the education and health care budgets.

So while we appreciate the member's support on Bill 37, when you look at their overall voting record on education in Ontario, it's disappointing and, at best, it's confusing.

Our goal is to protect the safety of all students in Ontario. I encourage my colleagues to support this very important piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to bring a few comments in response to the one-hour presentation by the member for Windsor West, who, I thought, did an outstanding job, not just touching on what's in this bill that we're debating today but also pointing out the facade that we have been listening to for the last 13 years and that has been perpetrated by the member from Kitchener Centre today: the trumpery notion that this is actually the government that is making our education system better.

Anybody who has been in a school over the last 10 years knows that our schools are getting poorer. The

children are getting worse education than they ever have been, and it has been because of this false image that this government—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd ask the House to come to order so I can hear the member for Prince Edward-Hastings. He has the right to offer his comments.

I'll give you some extra time because it was the other party that was interjecting.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member from Windsor West did an outstanding job today. I know that she actually speaks to educators who are in the classrooms today, as I do. I actually meet with educators all the time. I spend time in our high schools. As a matter of fact, I was in a high school on Friday, Quinte Secondary School in Belleville, speaking to students in a civics class there.

I can tell you that all you have to do is look at the recent EQAO results, which show that 50% of the students in Ontario aren't even hitting the provincial median when it comes to their math scores. It's not the fault of the teachers and it's not the fault of the students. This lands firmly in the lap of this Liberal government that has been failing our students, our kids, our families, our future workers in this province.

This bill is a good start to protecting those students, Mr. Speaker, but they've got to improve our education system and they haven't been doing it. It's been pure trumpery on their part.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I won't get involved in the typical mudslinging here.

Interjections.

Interjection: Will the real Paul Miller stand up?

Mr. Paul Miller: The real Paul Miller has stood up.

Speaker, there are things missing in this bill that are critical, one of those being that I know, over the years, in my dealings municipally with board and schools, that sometimes the teachers are falsely accused, maybe by the parents, maybe by their colleagues because they're professionally jealous, they don't like that teacher or they have a personal vendetta, or a vice-principal or a principal may have a vendetta against that teacher. I don't see anything in here that makes those people accountable who falsely accuse a teacher of something they didn't do. There is nothing in here to protect people who are accused by other people of wrongdoing. That's wrong. There should be things in here for that. That's not there. Hopefully on committee, you'll do something about that.

Secondly, I think we have to educate the parents sometimes. "Little Johnny wouldn't do that"—well, little Johnny did do that, and little Johnny is guilty of being a bad boy or a bad girl in school. The parents have to be responsible too, to understand that these things can happen. It's not always the teacher's fault.

As far as protection of the kids, there's no doubt about it. They should be protected 100% from any kind of

abuse in their school setting. But I think sometimes they don't delve into this enough, because there are other players out there who are playing games with people's careers. I think those people, if they are proven to be guilty of doing that, should be held accountable also.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to rise to make comments about the member from Windsor West regarding Bill 37.

I do have teachers in the family. My daughter is a teacher; my sister-in-law is a teacher. They keep me somewhat abreast of our education system. Contrary to some of the comments I've heard over this debate that teachers—there's always a rotten apple in the basket. What this bill is trying to do is deal with that.

But the challenge is when I hear the comments that our education system has gone you know where. Well, Speaker, I can tell you, maybe some of you who spoke are not quite as old as I am and don't remember those dreadful days when there were broken windows, and the teachers spent more time outside on this front lawn than many other groups—and nurses, I should say. They seem to have a very, very short memory.

I, too, spend a lot of time in the classroom. Probably I should be learning—and I try to learn, because kids today are fantastic.

When we talk about dealing with issues that create a challenge, we know it's only a very small portion, because the majority of teachers go to work every day. They are in charge of our kids, and at the end of the day, our kids are better off, so I have an enormous amount of respect. But there is the odd one, same as anywhere else, and this provides a system to be able to deal with that which is fair, unbiased and, at the end of the day, will protect our education system.

1630

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. I return to the member for Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I would like to thank the members from Kitchener Centre, Prince Edward-Hastings, Hamilton East-Stoney Creek and Northumberland-Quinte West. I swear, everybody with a really long riding name got up and took up some of my time now. I'd like to thank them all for their input.

I'd like to thank the member from Prince Edward-Hastings for recognizing that I do spend an awful lot of time speaking to those in the education sector, not just teachers, not just ECEs and EAs, but those who help keep our schools clean, those who answer the phones and deal with students who have concerns and parents who have concerns, those who work in the IT department and keep all the technology up and running.

While I have the time, I'd like to recognize that we have many support staff with the Catholic board in Windsor who started a strike today, who are out on the line fighting for better conditions for students in our education system.

I do spend an awful lot of time talking to—although probably not enough time. I could spend 24/7 talking to education workers about what's going on in the education system and still not know everything.

This bill is important. There's no doubt this bill is important. As I point out over and over again, there are very, very few educators who would ever be affected by this legislation. For the most part, they are very good people who go above and beyond, who do the best they can with the limited resources that they have. They give students the best education they possibly can under the circumstances, given the lack of tools they are given and, in many cases, the crumbling infrastructure they're expected to teach in.

I would just ask the government side, specifically the member from Kitchener Centre, rather than slinging mud, to listen to the concerns from this side of the room and actually take them to heart and address the shortfalls in the education system. The shortfalls were created by that side of the room, not this side of the room.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Are you ready to start again? Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: At the outset, I'd like to say that I'm going to be sharing my time today with the MPP for Kingston and the Islands, the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Speaker, just to begin with a brief recap, the Honourable Patrick LeSage was commissioned by the Ontario College of Teachers to conduct an independent and comprehensive review of its disciplinary processes and the publication of information relating to teacher misconduct. In his report, he concluded that the Ontario College of Teachers' transparency needed to be strengthened and noted that the Ontario College of Teachers was not obligated by law to require publication of details of outcomes or the names of teachers who were disciplined. He recommended that this no longer be permissible, with the exception of publication bans to protect victims.

What we're really talking about is a bill enacting a series of measures that's very similar to the way in which such professionals as doctors, lawyers, optometrists, dentists and others are governed. This takes the Ontario College of Teachers, treating it as a peer group among other professions, and asks the Ontario College of Teachers to elevate its standards to bring them up to an equivalent of the standards that are practised in other professions.

In many respects, this answers the question of how you get the bad actors in the teaching profession out of a position in which they can cause harm. In amending the Ontario College of Teachers Act, what this bill does is much more precisely define what misconduct is, what conduct is out of bounds and what must or can be done about it.

This isn't the first time that this bill has been before the House. In fact, its first try before the House came in the 40th Parliament, where it came before the House just prior to the election of 2014 and, of course, died on the

order paper when the election of 2014 was called. It was, in fact, reintroduced and must again be reintroduced because the legislation died on the order paper at prorogation.

Now that it's had a chance to attract some comment and to give rise to some debate, what this amended legislation does is protect the principle of the presumption of innocence and to ensure that everyone accused of impropriety is treated fairly, and that they know what allegations have been made and understand what the resolution process is. Indeed, it implements the recommendations made by Justice LeSage to strengthen the disciplinary processes for teachers and also for early childhood educators.

Following the release of Justice LeSage's report, the ministry did work immediately with the Ontario College of Teachers to support the college's implementation of those recommendations that could be implemented without legislative amendments; in other words, to take a lot of the easy stuff that didn't require coming into this chamber to change, and to say, "Look, you can make all of these changes under the legislation that governs the profession right now." Indeed, those changes were made.

While the LeSage review was under way, the Minister of Education in fact worked with the Ontario College of Teachers, which resulted in immediate action being taken to bring greater transparency and confidence in the system.

As of January four years ago, in 2012, the Ontario College of Teachers began to post outcomes of disciplinary proceedings on its website—again, a major step forward.

Justice LeSage's recommendations strike about the right balance between student safety and increased transparency and accountability, and also increased efficiencies in the processes. I think this is an important point, because Justice LeSage noted a general concern with the relationship of the unions or associations with members of council who sit on investigation, fitness-to-practise and discipline committees. Many of those recommendations were adopted as well.

At this point, Speaker, I'm going to sit down and allow one of my colleagues to pick up from there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The member for Kingston and the Islands.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I am pleased to rise today to speak on this very important bill, Bill 37, Protecting Students Act.

I would like to start my remarks today by saying how much I really have enjoyed listening to all of the comments that have been brought forward on this bill. I am a mother of three girls. They've all been through the public school system. We've had an absolutely awesome number of teachers who have been involved in their lives, and they've made just enormous differences to their academic success. I want to put that out there. That is very, very important to say.

This is not about speaking about the majority of teachers. It's about legislation that is for the very, very

small number, as the member from Windsor West has articulated, who have been found guilty of the worst transgressions possible against children.

I also want to reiterate what my colleague from Mississauga—Streetsville mentioned: that we did act immediately upon the recommendations of Justice LeSage. I think that that's very important.

This bill is about ensuring the safety of our children. It's something that is very, very important to us. As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, this is something that really does speak to me. I think it has been well articulated in the bill.

I also want to note that the recommendations that deal with the internal OCT operations and procedures have already been implemented by the OCT through bylaw or policy.

1640

I also want to talk a little bit about some of the comments from the third party on investments in our schools. I think it's a little bit outside of the bill in question, but we have made quite a number of investments in our schools. I had the opportunity to do an announcement with the Premier and the Minister of Education at Holy Cross secondary school, and we were able to see an absolutely beautiful learning commons room that was created for the students there and we had a chance to chat with the students in that room. It was absolutely fantastic.

So we are investing in infrastructure in our schools. It's just not the correct thing to say that we are not. I digress—I didn't want to steer too far away from the bill but I did think that it was important to mention that. We're all elected by constituents from our ridings, we represent them to the best of our ability, we advocate for them, but I think it's important to say what we see, and I am seeing investments in our communities and across the province and I think that it's extremely important to reiterate that.

The third party also mentioned that we didn't talk about what was in the legislation. I beg to differ; we did. I'm just going to review a few of those items. This legislation will amend the Ontario College of Teachers Act to require the automatic revocation of a member's certificate by a discipline panel if the member is found guilty of sexual abuse or acts relating to child pornography. Obviously, this is not happening frequently. This legislation is going to apply to very, very few people, but it's important that we protect our children.

It will also require the publication of all decisions of the discipline committee on the OCT website. It will set clear rules for the use of dispute resolution. It will provide employers with clarification regarding the reporting of members whose duties have been restricted. This is also very important. It will provide the authority to the OCT to disclose information about members to the police and other regulators. It will also improve timelines for the investigation and consideration of complaints.

I do feel that we are setting out a comprehensive process and I think that we have looked at many different aspects of the bill, but when it comes down to protecting

our children against sexual abuse and child pornography, we cannot do enough. I'm going to end my time there. Thank you. Merci. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. Again, it's a pleasure to rise, on behalf of my constituents in Cambridge, to add a few more comments to the debate today.

I know I've said a few times that I've had children in school for decades, and I really mean it. My daughter started kindergarten in 1990 and I've had a child continually in elementary and high school ever since. My youngest is in grade 8. I want to, again, give a shout-out to the teachers that have really inspired my own children to succeed. Because I've had kids finish and who are now in the working world, I know how important it is, not only for a stellar education, to have those individuals day by day inspire and teach my children and to be able to give them the start that they need in life.

It's not just parents who do this—but I know, as a parent, that the safety of our children in school is of paramount importance to all of them. Because I live in a rural area, I've always been putting my children on a bus in the morning to get to school. I know at the end of the day, when we catch up, I want to make sure that they've had a safe environment. I think all of us in this House agree on that particular thing. I don't think you'll hear anybody not wanting to make sure that our children are safe.

We also need to ensure that the integrity of the teaching profession is a top priority for the government. Not only is it a top priority—I know that the Ontario teachers' college has gone ahead and instituted part of the recommendations from the Patrick LeSage report, but there are a few others that we're just needing to address right now.

It's also the perception of safety. That's paramount to parents. You want to make sure that you feel your children are safe in this area, and that gives us the confidence that our schools are safe. It's also safety of the children. Each child going to school needs to make sure that they feel safe at school, that they're not bullied, but they are safe at school and have a safe place to go to—to their parent or another adult that they trust—if something happens at school.

I'm very proud of the proposed Protecting Students Act. It would make the Ontario College of Teachers disciplinary processes more efficient and help better protect students and teachers. We want to make sure that all Ontario families continue to have the confidence that their children are safe and protected in school.

I also wanted to address the fact that because I've had children in school for many, many years, I have a unique perspective, perhaps, in this House about how the education system has grown and changed over the years that my children have been going to school. For instance, my daughter, who started school in 1990, went into high school in 1999, just as the grade 12 double cohort came

in, and she was in a lower grade. I remember that year, in 1999, those children in grade 9 had no textbooks. My daughter was small, and she shared a desk and a chair with another student. That year, because there were no textbooks, the teacher had to actually photocopy the work that the kids were doing. She didn't have enough money to actually have a copy for each child, so she doubled up those children and had a buddy system, so each buddy was able to get the required homework and they had to share. That made it difficult for my family. Not only were we rural, I was working 12-hour shifts, so I wasn't able to actually transport my daughter to and from the town to be able to work with her buddy. She had to do a lot of that work on the phone. She calls it now one of her lost years of high school.

So I've seen the investment, over and over again, since 2003, when this government has put in billions of dollars into rehabilitating the schools, not only with a safe learning experience, with enough textbooks, with enough equipment in the room, with enough desks and chairs for the students, but I'm also having a few schools in my riding renovated right now with the new money to make sure that the schools are up to standard.

As I said, I know that we all want to protect our children here at school. I've been able to see, year over year, how we've been benefiting and investing in our children's education and the environment that they're learning in. We know there's more work to do. We continue to increase the budget to ensure that those issues that I talked about, with my own family in the mid-1990s with the lack of resources, never happen again. So I'm very proud of this bill and certainly want to add my support to it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate on Bill 37. Today is the first day at Queen's Park for some of our new pages, and I think that if there was ever a timely act to be debating for a group of people from grades 7 and 8, this would probably be the bill, because it talks about an environment that they're really familiar with, and that is the school system.

Often, I think with the lives we lead as parents, sometimes you'll find a child will spend more time with their teacher than they will of their waking hours actually with their own parents or their brothers or sisters.

It's a way, I think, of making the Legislature a meaningful experience for the young people, to be talking about what is happening in the education system.

When you go into the grade 5 classrooms—which I know a lot of us do because that's when students first experience civics in the curriculum—you start talking about schools and you talk about schools a couple of hundred years ago, perhaps, and you realize that the public education system is very much in its infancy. But when you talk to younger people—they think about the 1700s or the 1800s and they talk about school then, public education would have been a very remarkable experience for a young person then, because chances are, if

you were a very ordinary person, you didn't get to go to school. It was one of those rights that was only afforded to the very rich, to the very privileged. But I think, over the years, what has been true is that every generation tries to leave the world a better place for the generation that comes after them—that's, obviously, their children and their grandchildren—and the vehicle we use to do that is the public education system. That's where the skills training takes place. That's where you learn about civics. You learn about all the skills that are going to carry you through life. It's important that we pay attention to that environment and we understand that there are a lot of young people who enjoy their school year. They come into contact with adults who are teaching.

1650

The teachers in the province of Ontario, I'm convinced, are second to none when it comes to the quality of education that they impart to our young people. That goes for all the school systems that are publicly funded, and even into the private education system.

Ontario, I think, takes public education very seriously. In order to do that, we need to ensure that when our young people are in any other environment outside the home—but also including the home—but publicly when young people are in areas where they come into contact with adults, we need to know that there's a system in place that ensures that they're safe and there's a system in place that ensures that they're in a healthy environment, and, as I said, Speaker, a very safe environment. That's why we need to have a bill such as Bill 37, that ensures and provides the confidence to parents that when their child is at school, they will be protected; that there's a level of protection that they should be afforded and they should anticipate; and that, when claims are made or when charges are made or when there's suspicion of some impropriety, there's a fair system that deals with that quickly. There's a justice system that gets brought into place that has all the elements of a good justice system and ensures that the issue—whatever the issue may be—is dealt with very seriously. It's dealt with in a way that all the facts come out. It's dealt with in a way that young people are able to express themselves properly.

Bill 37, because of the consultation that has taken place on this bill, is one that I think all sides have had a say on, and now it's in the House. It's designed to ensure that those years that our young people spend in the education system—that there's a level of accountability.

Teaching, as I said, is a profession that we all admire. I think we probably all know somebody who is a teacher. I think, probably over the years, we know teachers who have made a big difference in our life, Speaker. There are a lot of positive things that come out of the teaching profession. There are a lot of positive things that are imparted to our young people.

What Bill 37 does is say, "When you go into that environment, there's a level of protection that's afforded to you as a young person and a level of accountability that's expected of our teachers." I think it's a well-

prepared bill. I think it deserves the support of all members of this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We now go to questions and comments.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'm pleased to rise and talk briefly to Bill 37. We heard throughout the Legislature that a number of us have family members who are teachers. Of course, that's no different in my family as well. One was a principal; another one was a high school teacher, actually.

One of the things I appreciate about this bill is, to me, it sounds like a code of conduct of which I know teachers are obligated to—and actually, even students are obligated to a code of conduct as well.

A shout-out to good old Winston Churchill Public School in Chatham. I went to Chatham Collegiate Institute. It was a great school, as a matter of fact. Of course, my kids went to The Pines, the Ursuline College.

One of the things I liked about the Ursuline College was the fact that it had a dress code. I really liked that idea simply because of the fact that it didn't matter whether you came from a very well-to-do family or a not-well-to-do family; the children were all wearing a uniform. There's something about behaviour in uniforms which I think is very appealing to even the conduct of how these young people act. I didn't see that in this particular bill. It's maybe something that we as a caucus, when this bill passes second reading—and we're going to support this bill, but we do have some amendments that we would like to see put in there. That might be one that I would like to see put in as well.

We talk about self-esteem and we talk about the safety of our children. We talk about that teachers have a responsibility. I understand that as well, but I believe that students do as well. I think we all need to kind of work together. Maybe there's an opportunity for us in committee to make this bill even stronger. It's a good bill. We will support Bill 37.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Just before I speak about Bill 37, let me say hello to my friend Leroy Siemon in the members' gallery here today, a good friend. Welcome to Queen's Park, Leroy.

Speaker, as you know, teachers are among our most valuable resources when it comes to our education system. I had my favourite teacher, Max Matthews at Prince of Wales Collegiate in St. John's, Newfoundland, one of the best teachers I ever had. I suppose if we asked our pages if they have a favourite teacher, they probably do, and maybe even a not-so-favourite teacher. Sometimes that happens as well.

I guess, like everyone else, some of my best friends are teachers. I've had a couple of those friends who have been accused, I would say falsely accused, by troubled students, but it leaves a scar on their career, a black eye on their reputation. This bill, I would hope, is meant to do something about that. Nobody wants to see anybody's reputation ruined. On the other hand, if you've done

something wrong with a student, then the appropriate action should be taken against you for that. As long as due process is followed—and that's very important, Speaker: due process. We all have the same rules and regulations to follow, and as long as due process is followed, this will be open.

I just want to say again, as others have said this afternoon, the vast majority of educators in this province are decent people who nurture and care for our young ones, very caring individuals, who spend their own money on school supplies and so on. This bill will protect them, but at the same time, those who don't have the best interests of our students at heart will be taken care of in the way they should be taken care of.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you for recognizing me, Speaker. It gives me great honour to be able to stand here and give comment to some of the debate that's come forward from our side of the House here on Bill 37.

I think the member from Mississauga—Streetsville gave a really good summary of the central processes that went through to get us to this place where we can now finally put this bill back in front of the House for a third time. Really, the time has come. After the LeSage report came out—this is something that could have happened earlier with elections and stuff, but it's happening now, and I'm really delighted that no one's got props in the House that are hanging up.

The member from Kingston and the Islands talked about her considerations of the bill. But I was particularly interested in the comments from our Minister of Natural Resources, as she talked about her children and the process they went through and the important work that the teachers in those schools had for her children growing up.

We all know that the instances of concern we're trying to address here are minimal within in our educational system. It's extraordinarily important that we have as good protection in our schools as we would in any organization—with volunteers and background and credit checks and all those things—but particularly with teachers, with their professional designations, that, should there be issues that come forward and there are convictions, they are removed from their certificates and they're no longer licensed, so that they can't go and teach in other parts of the province or the country.

I'm particularly interested in the comments from the Minister of Labour. This demonstrates the class of this individual member, that he can take a bill, reflect so clearly and refer it to the pages who are here for their first day. This is really important, to have the pages here to hear about the debate, in order that they, as they move further in their education, know and their parents know that they will be protected. Because that is part of the importance. As parents—and I had two children of my own who went through the system—we want to know they're safe, and I think this bill will go a long way to giving parents that reassurance.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm glad to stand up and just add some viewpoints from my riding in Elgin–Middlesex–London.

I want to thank the speakers on the government side. We heard some excellent points brought forward. I'm glad that set of speakers didn't take the opportunity to bash either the opposition or the third party, like previous speakers on the government side have done.

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I do want to take a note of exception, where the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry—who I'm still waiting to get special purpose account funding information from, which I'm sure will be coming soon—did make mention that in the 1990s, they didn't have textbooks. I'm sure if she visited my riding and the local schools I have—there are many textbook-sharings going on to this day. That problem has not been fixed. I'm hoping the government doesn't think that they've fixed that problem. There's still a terrible problem going on.

In fact, I was speaking to some Toronto-area students, and their concern is that a lot of the textbooks are online now. However, the printing costs associated with doing the work has been downloaded to the families, who are now at home having to download the papers. There's not even the money in the school system anymore to print off work sheets for these students in class. They have to go home, print their work sheets and bring them into the school, and that's an added cost to parents. So the funding of the students and the schools in the system does need to be fixed.

I will talk quickly on this bill. Look, nobody is saying that teachers are doing this in mass numbers, but it's a professional college, it's a professional association, professional teachers—we need to ensure that like all other professional colleges, if there's a sex abuse crime or child pornography going on, those who are convicted of those terrible crimes can't teach again. That's why we've got to ensure that this bill passes and ensures that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. That concludes our questions and comments. The member for Kingston and the Islands can reply.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to thank all of the members for speaking today: the member from Mississauga–Streetsville, the member from Cambridge, the Minister of Labour, and the members from Chatham–Kent–Essex, Windsor–Tecumseh and Elgin–Middlesex–London.

The member from Cambridge talked about perception of safety. This is very, very important. I think it's something that's important not only for students, but also for parents, and it's also important for teachers as well. We need to create a safe system, as the Minister of Labour said, for our teachers and for our children so that child pornography and sexual abuse does not happen.

We've come a long way, and I know, from the time when I was in school, that there were certainly situations that were going on that were most problematic. Gladly,

we have moved on from that time. I'm trying to bring myself back to that time and remember how things were when there was somebody who was problematic. It did happen; there's no doubt that it did happen.

We have brought forward this bill because there is a situation. It is not extensive, but it does happen, and we need to create legislation that protects our children. There is just no if, and or but about it.

I also want to say that I think it's important to consider teachers in this situation when they know that something problematic is happening. I would expect that they will be comforted as well to know that there is legislation there that will be there for the children.

I have an excellent relationship with the union leaders in my community. In fact, I had a great conversation with those union leaders from OECTA just last week. I know that these are individuals who are very, very passionate about the children in their classrooms. They want to do a good job, and that's not just about services for children, but it's also about making sure that they're very safe.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate. I recognize the member for Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate being recognized. That's something that I have been looking forward to all my life.

Interjection: You're number one.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm number one.

This bill was first introduced in 2013. The PC caucus originally supported this bill, but decided that it didn't go far enough. The bill was reintroduced in 2016, in May, but then it died upon prorogation.

The intent of this bill is to amend the Ontario College of Teachers Act and the Early Childhood Educators Act in order to continue to implement the recommendations stemming from the LeSage report that was released in 2012. In November 2011, the Ontario College of Teachers commissioned the Honourable Patrick LeSage to review its investigation and discipline procedures and outcomes, and dispute resolutions program.

If the bill is approved, then all 49 recommendations of this review would be implemented either through the proposed statutory amendments to the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996, and associated regulations or by the OCT through bylaw or policy.

One of the things it does is ensure a teacher's certificate is automatically revoked if he or she has been found guilty of certain forms of sexual abuse or acts relating to child pornography. This is an issue, when I talk about child pornography or sexual abuse, that has been around for a lot of years. It's just that we are trying to come to terms with it.

I certainly had no bad experiences when I went to school. I hear some of the members talking about having to wear overcoats in their classrooms. Well, actually, I did, as a young fellow, because we went to a small school out in the country, and if somebody forgot to put the coal in the stove, we got a little chilly at times.

Mr. Paul Miller: What grade were you in, Randy?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Grade 1. We didn't have kindergarten then and we walked to school; there was no busing when I went to school. However, I'm not going to cry that I had such a hard time, because we had a good education. We had two lady teachers who felt it was their obligation to give us the best education they could.

The terms of abuse have changed over the years, too. Certainly, this isn't what sexual abuse is, but I can remember a black thing about this wide and about this long that, if it wasn't used on us, was used to threaten us. It was a rather intimidating thing. Some members might understand what I'm talking about. But that would be considered abuse these days. That would be considered abuse because society has changed.

So I guess, when we are trying to recognize sexual abuse, maybe back 50 or 60 years ago, whenever it was, if some of these things were done, it was just kept quiet. Hopefully the child would get over it, and hopefully the teacher got through life without too many more problems. But the problem is that it would never end if somebody started on this path of sexual abuse or child pornography.

I was very fortunate to be with the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock this year because of something I did that had to do with her bill, the Saving the Girl Next Door Act. I helped her out a little bit with it, so I was invited to the OPP headquarters in Orillia with the member, and we had quite a talk. I'll tell you, it was very eye-opening to talk to the police there and understand what is going on in this world, or in this province, pertaining to sexual abuse and this type of thing. The stories they told us are very frightening and they are very sad.

The problem with this type of thing—I'm not a psychiatrist, but I would consider it an illness when people do this or are caught doing this. Certainly the victims take a long time to get over that. I remember as a young fellow, we were brought up kind of that if something was going wrong, you sucked it up, if I can use that term, and got on with life. Some things are very hard for you to be able to do that, and certainly it would be very difficult, if you were a victim, to try to get over some of these things that can be done to you by certain people.

1710

But as we progress through time, we are in the age of technology where you can sit and use your electronic devices to get information. That's the good part about it. Something like an atomic bomb—using nuclear energy is great for producing electricity, but it can also be used to kill people, so there are two sides to that. It's the same with technology. You can use it for the greater good, but it can also be used for doing things that are very disgusting to society.

I think because of technology, people who are skilled with the use of this type of thing have been able to find people who are abusing young children more easily, and so this has come out in the forefront of society in general. These programs they are using can search through cyberspace, and as I understand it they can find people

who continually go to a certain website to look at these things and they are able to narrow it down and find them.

As a child, when you go to school, you're brought up to trust your parents and you're brought up to trust people in authority. As a child, you go to school and that trust is there for the most part all through your schooling, but there is the odd time that, because you trust an authority figure, you can fall into harm's way if there's somebody there who chooses to deal in this type of thing.

I find it surprising that the bill would require employers to inform the college when they have restricted a teacher's duties or dismissed him or her for misconduct. I would have thought that would have been a requirement anyway, without being put into a bill. I guess I'm naive, but I would have thought that that was normal practice; that if somebody is doing these types of things, automatically they would be reported.

It also says in here that it provides the authority to the college to disclose information about members to the police and other regulators. I would have thought that would be a normal practice. I would think that in other institutions, other than a school situation, that is being done. The longer it takes to report criminal activity, the harder it is to prove it, because you have a certain timeline there where a case can grow cold. So I would think that that's something that if it has to be put in place in this bill, is something that's a good part of that bill—that the authority is given to whoever should report these things.

The new bill, as I understand it, will ensure that a teacher's certificate is automatically revoked if he or she has been found guilty of certain forms of sexual abuse or acts relating to child pornography. I think this is an important part here. It will be automatically revoked if he or she has been found guilty. I think we've got to be careful with this type of thing. As I stated earlier, some of us know of cases where false accusations have been put forward and ruined people's careers. For whatever reason, these things have been done. So I think anybody who is involved in this type of thing on the—can I say the management side of this?—has to be very careful that things are true, that the facts are true before anything progresses. That's why I was surprised that it provides authority to the college to disclose information about members to the police. I would think that would have been something that would have been done sooner, sooner than later, because the timelines of crimes—as I say, the longer they get, the harder it is to prove things. So if there is a case of abuse or child pornography found, then the police should get involved as soon as possible. They are trained to investigate these types of things and find out whether the allegations are true or false. But, again, in this bill, that puts that in there so the authorities can be a little bit more confident that they're doing the right thing.

We need to protect our children as much as we can. There is certainly nothing wrong with the school of hard knocks. Children have to be able to make mistakes. That's how you learn. But when you're dealing with this

type of thing, you're usually dealing with a grown-up, and your trust in that grown-up—until it's broken—usually doesn't go away. And these predators, as I would like to use that term, know how to gain a child's trust and maybe make them do things that they wouldn't normally do.

You know, as has been said by all sides of the House today, this isn't a big number of people that get involved with this thing. It's just a few people in society that get involved with this type of thing. So we are not dealing with huge numbers. But that one or two people that are involved in this thing can affect a lot of people because of the tools they have at hand, such as the Internet and using those types of things.

That's not the only abuse that can happen with the Internet. We hear of bullying over the Internet where if a certain few want to pick on somebody, they'll text messages or do whatever or they'll take an inappropriate picture and throw it on the Internet to bully people. That's been going on for a while and this House has taken measures to try to stop that type of thing. I do believe that education does not only start and stop in a school, and that probably parents should be more aware of what their children are doing with their electronic devices.

My children are all grown. They are out on their own. They all have good jobs. I have three boys and none of them have come back to live on my couch, so I'm very thankful for that type of thing.

Interjection: Just wait.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Just wait. Anyway, I do know that all three of them have certain rules in their houses when they are dealing with these electronic devices and one thing is that their children do not play with the bedroom door closed on these devices. It's not that the parents don't want to trust their children; it's that they are afraid what might come over that thing from somebody else. These predators are good at doing that type of thing.

I don't think anyone here is criticizing our teachers who are in our schools. We've been fortunate—at least, I know our family has been fortunate—to have great teachers. I call them my friends, the ones that taught my boys in school. We actually hang out with some of them and have gotten along real well. So I don't think it's criticism here—it's just that the system maybe had to be changed a little bit to report these types of things and make it clear to the boards or whoever is in authority that they have the power to do this and they have the power to do it quickly, and maybe we can get it stopped before too much harm is done. I think that part of the bill should be commended.

1720

I think that when it gets to committee, there are some amendments that I'm sure we are going to put forward. Some examples could be a public website that would list those individuals who have had their certificates revoked for certain kinds of sexual abuse. That just helps get the information out there. I don't have an issue with that. If you're going to engage in this type of behaviour, I think

people should know about it. It could be your neighbour next door. You don't know that. It could be somebody down the street or somebody on the other side of the country who is engaged in this type of thing. These people need to be known in their communities—who they are.

Section 37 currently permits the council or the executive committee, without a hearing, to issue a new certificate or remove a suspension if a member's certificate has been revoked or suspended. The amendment, which proposes a new subsection 37(3), would mean that certificates could only be reinstated without a hearing if the revocation or suspension has resulted from professional misconduct that involves sexual abuse of a student, sexual misconduct or a prohibited act involving child pornography.

Also, section 43(1) is an amendment that allows for a new regulation-making authority that would allow the council to make regulations relating to members' professional learning about their duty to report under the Child and Family Services Act, which requires reporting to a children's aid society if there are grounds to believe that a person will harm or sexually molest a child.

Section 49(7) would be an amendment so that the notice of hearing or other specified information would remain on the website whether the notation of a decision or resolution is still applicable or not.

I think there are a few things in this bill that are good. There are certainly some amendments that our party would like to see in the bill. The bill has been on the books for—it was first introduced, I believe, in 2013, so it's something that I think all parties have debated quite a bit in the past and would support. I think it's important that this time it get through the committee process, so that it has a good shot at making it through this Legislature before just over a year from now. I believe that we should proceed with this as quickly as possible and get it into committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's a pleasure to follow my good friend from Perth—Wellington, with his family roots in Essex county. Of course, we can't forget that.

Mr. Pettapiece started off by saying that we can trace this back to the LeSage report of four years ago and its 49 recommendations. You have to wonder how this has languished without being such a priority for the past four years. I believe the government has tried to bring it in; they fiddled around with it and they still can't understand why we still have concerns whether the bill allows for a fair process and adequate protection of educators against frivolous or vexatious accusations.

I agree that this bill is long overdue, and we should certainly strengthen any penalties. I believe the public believes there should be stricter penalties for anybody found guilty under the sections of Bill 37.

We obviously have tens of thousands of airplanes that take off and land safely every day, but when one of them fails to do that, that makes news. We have thousands and

thousands of educators and others who work in our schools, and nothing happens. But then one day, you read in the newspaper that somebody has been accused. Most of the people within the education system are there for all the right reasons. They are there to nurture our students and protect our students, and we thank them for that. This bill has to make sure that anyone within the system who is accused gets a fair hearing, due process and that their rights are protected. If they are found guilty, the long arm of the law should certainly come down with a very solid hammer and make sure that nothing like that ever happens in our school system again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M. Shafiq Qaadri: J'ai le plaisir et aussi en même temps la responsabilité de souligner quelques points importants sur le projet de loi 37. Par exemple, assurer la sécurité de nos enfants et de nos élèves tout en protégeant l'intégrité de la noble profession d'enseignant a toujours été et demeure l'une des priorités de notre gouvernement. Aussi, monsieur le Président, comme vous le savez, le projet de loi 37 est une étape de plus dans notre partenariat avec le collège des enseignants de l'Ontario dans l'amélioration constante des pratiques et processus assurant la discipline de nos enseignants.

Speaker, first of all, I appreciate and recognize the perhaps unusually civilized tone with regard to the remarks from all sides on Bill 37. I think, as all of us will appreciate, this is of course a very delicate issue and matter.

Reading through some of its particulars with regard to, for example, the disciplinary issues, the process of analysis of the particular case and yes, hopefully being able to deal with things such as vexatious or frivolous concerns, it really brings to mind that perhaps we're bringing teachers up to the standard that physicians are held to.

As you can imagine, physicians, who unfortunately on occasion do kind of transgress some of these boundaries, are brought forward to the College of Physicians and Surgeons and other bodies. There is an entire mechanism, a whole kind of disciplinary process, which has been in place and which does seem to work. Yes, there is a long delay of the law, as always, but I think what we're really attempting to do, in the interests of the integrity and safety of our students and of course le contraire, the reverse, the integrity and safety and protection of our teachers—let's support Bill 37.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: A number of speakers today have raised the issue of teachers or early childhood educators being falsely accused. I don't know how often that happens, but it is incumbent on us as we draft this legislation to ensure that those kinds of protections are in place as well.

Last night, my wife and I watched *Indictment: The McMartin Trial*. It's a film. It's based on a court case in California, where members of the McMartin family were

charged and jailed—I think they were all jailed. One was jailed for alleged sexual molestation and abuse of children in their preschool.

This ended up being one of the most expensive and longest-running criminal trials in US legal history. Their guilt had already been established by the media, aided and abetted by the state prosecutor or county prosecutor and what was portrayed as an unprofessional therapist who assisted the children to fabricate stories of abuse, devil worship and what have you. The defender is played by the actor James Woods. It's a film well worth watching. The accusations were made back in 1983. The trial ran from 1987 to 1990. All charges were eventually dropped after years of sex abuse hysteria, \$50 million and a seven-year trial.

So I suggest, as we work on Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act, that it doesn't go far enough. It's incumbent on us to make sure we are protecting all concerned.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a pleasure to be able to respond to the member from Perth—Wellington regarding his remarks on Bill 37, an act to amend the Early Childhood Educators Act. He brought back memories for me. I had a bit of a personal relationship with the strap back then.

He brought forward some very good points, and he expressed his support for this bill. I think that we all support this bill. But there are some things that other members have expressed, and I would also like to re-express them. Teachers, regardless of how old their students are, are placed in a position of trust and responsibility, and the vast, vast majority of those teachers take that trust and that responsibility very seriously and do an excellent job. In some cases where that doesn't occur, the rule of law should be very strict, which this bill attempts to do.

But in classroom situations and in situations where you're dealing with children and with their parents, we have to be very, very careful about false accusations and vexatious accusations, because once the accusation is made and made public, it's all about the first headline. Everyone in politics knows that. It's all about the first headline, and that's something that could ruin a lot of very innocent people who are actually the ones trying hardest to do the best job.

That's why I think that we're all taking this bill and these remarks very seriously, because this is an incredibly serious issue. I hope that we can continue, as this bill goes through the process, to make sure that things are in place to make sure that people aren't unduly hurt when they are falsely accused.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The response from the member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I want to thank the members from Windsor—Tecumseh, Etobicoke North, Haldimand—Norfolk and Timiskaming—Cochrane.

I guess that we've heard enough about accusations in the House today that may be false and how it does hurt

your reputation, because that's what happens: that one headline and, bang, your career could be done.

I think that gets back to the point that I made during my 20 minutes: to get this to the police as soon as possible. They are trained to handle this type of thing. I don't think a school board wants to—they only have to get involved so far, and the police can sort out whether it is a false accusation, without the publicity and that type of thing. We have to be very careful with this because, as has been pointed out, it could ruin people for something they didn't do.

I really believe, as we all do, that this is something that happens once in a while. It isn't something that's rampant through our system. True, our police forces have units dedicated to this type of thing, where all they do is look for predators. But it's mostly because of the tools they have—the Internet and whatever else. They have to keep up with this because this is how a lot of this is perpetrated. I think that's why society is more aware that there could be problems.

Unfortunately, it has happened in our school system. There have been cases that we know about where this type of thing has happened, so we have to be vigilant that it doesn't happen anymore and, if it does, get it to the proper authorities and make sure that the investigation is thorough and try to get this type of thing stopped—although that might be a difficult thing to do, as I said, with technology.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a privilege—really, it is—to stand in my place and bring the concerns and the thoughts and the feedback on Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act, 2016.

I think that I bring a little bit of a different context to this bill, in the sense that I served as a school board trustee for nine years on the Waterloo Region District School Board, and I served as the vice-president and president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association for some four years and as vice-president of the Canadian School Boards Association, so I actually had the unique opportunity to learn how other provinces are dealing with these very issues across this country.

I do think it's important for us to acknowledge that the profession of teaching has changed drastically in the province of Ontario, particularly in the last 20 years. There was at one point a public education system in this province which was incredibly rich. It was enriched, and its goal as a system—of systems across the province, really—was to enrich the lives of children in the province of Ontario, recognizing that when you get education right, a lot of other things fall into place: Justice falls into place, health care falls into place, mental health, the economy. When children enter an education system and that system is well funded and the roles and responsibilities of the people contained within that system are well understood and are incredibly clear, children reach their potential, families realize their potential, and communities are strengthened. So my true passion really, as I

entered into the political field, had to do with getting education right.

Now, there have been a lot of comments all afternoon about the context of the role that resources play in our education system, mainly funding. I do want to just look at Bill 37, Protecting Students Act, 2016, through the lens which is a mandated, legislated responsibility that school boards have for the well-being of children. Now, this was a new, added responsibility that school boards found themselves with, in addition to, of course, balancing the budget and ensuring that financial resources were allocated in a responsible manner within the means that they have as local school boards.

We have seen—and I think it warrants a comment—that the local autonomy of school boards across this province has been greatly diminished over the years by a centralized motivation, if you will, a centralized movement, in particular that was started in the Mike Harris years and now has been very much continued through the McGuinty-Wynne years. That is, a lot of the directives for education in the province of Ontario are very much tied from this place to the local school boards. That has affected, in many respects, the culture of teaching, as has a very litigious environment that school boards find themselves in, which has changed even the very basic relationships that we see in our schools.

The major shift also happened with Bill 160, when principals and vice-principals were removed from their respective unions. That changed the hierarchy, if you will. It changed the work environment; it changed the strata of responsibilities in our schools, which in turn affected accountability.

Bill 37, Protecting Students Act, of course, aims to address some gaps that have existed for four or five years now—well-known gaps because of various media reports, because school boards came to the table, because the Ontario College of Teachers also was found to have some weaknesses contained within that institution that needed to be addressed. The 49 recommendations—I think 49 recommendations, in total—look to address these problematic areas.

But as we review how we got here, I think it is important to address some of the financial circumstances which have changed education fundamentally in the province of Ontario.

I grew up in Toronto and I went to Earl Haig and Earl Beatty and Harbord Collegiate. I did spend one year out in Nova Scotia, where I really did have the opportunity to see what a "have-not" province and a "have" province looked like, especially from an education and a health care perspective. So I bring that context to this debate.

But we must remember that when you follow the money, you do follow the real priorities of any government: NDP, Conservative or Liberal. I must say that in 1995, in the 1994-95 budget, when the so-called Common Sense Revolution was in full flight, \$1 billion, 5% in the first year, was removed from education. It's important to benchmark that piece of information because, in truth, when you remove that much money from

education, you actually embed the inequities across the province which were already starting to show their face.

Following that, Rozanski came out in 2002. The Rozanski report identified several areas where the funding model was found to be lacking. The 2002 date is important because some of the recommendations—in fact, many of the recommendations from that report, which addressed the Common Sense Revolution, the \$1-billion reduction in funding and the funding model as it existed at that point in time—have never been addressed by this government and some of those recommendations included having an effective model for distributing funding between rural and urban boards and large and small boards.

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We see this play itself out in today's province. If you are a small rural school board in the province of Ontario, you are still fundamentally dealing with a student-enrolment-driven funding model. So the fewer students you have in your school system, the less funding you have, which really moves against this whole concept that public education is the great equalizer.

Rozanski also recommended that the structure of cost benchmarks should be addressed. This has also never happened, Mr. Speaker. This actually means—does the per pupil funding reflect the per pupil cost? It obviously costs a lot more money in some jurisdictions to educate a child than it does in other jurisdictions.

Then, of course, there was a recommendation, which has also never been honoured, that we address the local flexibility of expenditures for school boards, because there was this premise, there was this thought at one point in the history of this province that locally elected school boards really know their boards the best and are elected to serve their students and honour that work. In order to do so, they did require some local flexibility. That was a Rozanski 2002 recommendation as well.

The special education funding envelope: The complex needs of special education students right now in the province of Ontario, have grown astronomically, in part because we have a better understanding of some of the complex special education needs of children, and in others because there are some basic human rights—there have been charter challenges to the education system in the province of Ontario, recognizing that every child has the right to attend school, regardless of their ability and regardless of their challenges. Quite honestly, there's a lot of money attached to some of those children, as it should be. They should be funded. They have the right to attend their school system.

Finally, some of my colleagues from rural and northern boards will recognize that the student transportation funding model has never truly been addressed in a comprehensive way. The Peel District School Board, for instance, has been disadvantaged now going on 11 years because the funding model was really just built in. It was baked in. The inequity was baked into the funding model for the Peel District School Board. They will tell you very clearly what happened with that.

So how does this all relate to Bill 37? There have been tensions in the school system, and when the Ministry of Education legislated this concept of well-being on school boards, the general consensus and the general question was, "Well, how are you going to measure well-being?" Who's going to measure well-being? Who is going to define well-being when we have incredible amounts of students who struggle? One in five children, Mr. Speaker, struggle with mental health.

That all leads up to 2003, when there was the promise of addressing these gaps, which were well researched. The evidence was there. Then, of course, we run into the 2003 promise of having an "education Premier" and embedding and infusing all of this new funding. But the truth of the matter is, if you look and follow the funding, that gap has never truly been addressed. It has never kept up with the rate of inflation. It has never kept up with the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm trying to hear the member for Kitchener-Waterloo and there is a general din in here; there are a number of private conversations under way. I'd ask you to please keep the volume somewhat down and then I can hear the member for Kitchener-Waterloo as she relates her comments to this bill.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The funding model: The promise of restructuring and comprehensively reviewing how public education is funded to the four publicly funded systems in the province of Ontario—that promise was never realized. Now, I know it's a surprise for some people in this room that the Liberals did not keep their promise on this, but even when special education was—there was the ISA, the intensive support amount, there was a five-year process.

I remember, my first year as a trustee, then-Minister Gerard Kennedy didn't like the fact that we had proven that our students in the Waterloo Region District School Board required this funding. We made the case. We did the documentation. We spent the money. The administrative process was extensive but they didn't like that and so they scrapped it. When boards could actually make the case to the ministry that these students required this funding, the ministry didn't like the fact that they were going to have to foot the bill, so they scrapped the ISA five-year funding, which is really unfortunate.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, member for Kingston and the Islands?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Mr. Speaker, I think that under standing order 23(b)(i), the member needs to speak to the question under discussion, and I don't think that's happening at this moment.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Same point of order, member for Windsor-Tecumseh?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: A different point of order: If this was a classroom, you'd be keeping these kids after

school. You've asked them to keep the din down; they're not. I don't know how she can hear what she's saying. I can't hear what my member is saying because of the din over there at the back.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's a different point of order.

I hear the member for Kitchener-Waterloo speaking about education issues. I think it's worthwhile to point out that our comments need to be relevant to the bill. I had to rule on this earlier this afternoon when there was an objection by a New Democratic member to a government member who was talking about education in a broad sense, and I found her comments to be in order. I find your comments to be in order, and I'd ask you to please continue. You have the floor. Sorry for the interruption.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Ironically, I was just following on the comments from the member from Kingston and the Islands and the previous comment she had made about resources. I do appreciate the ruling because I am talking about the culture of the education system and the role that teachers have in that system and the rules and responsibility and the need for clarity. What I'm basically making the case for, and it's well documented, is that our schools have become incredibly complex. The pressures that exist in those schools are very well documented. Historically, the role that funding plays is an addition to that tension.

Following the 2002 Rozanski report, there was the promise of an infusion of education—and then, of course, we had Bill 150 in 2012, which really poisoned the education sector in a very meaningful, long-standing way.

The Premier at the time said, "Everyone is going to get cut and everyone has to pay the price." So there were cuts to education. In fact, there have been cuts to education in subsequent years. It's interesting because when Mike Harris made 5% cuts to the education budget, back in 1995, there were people on that front lawn and they were burning his figure in effigy. You were here; I'm sure you remember that. Those were tense times. When the Liberals introduced a budget that had 5% cuts across the board, people were afraid to speak out against that. It's really incredible that there's this disparity between those two stories.

In Bill 37—we are here because obviously there have been well-publicized cases where trust has been breached between staff and between vice-principals and principals as well. I think it's really important for us to understand the disciplinary process that's attached to Bill 37. Teachers know that they are always on duty. I can tell you this from personal experience. They are professionals, and they uphold high standards of conduct. What Bill 37 means to address is the gaps: the transparency gap, the accountability gap and, really, a call for justice, if you will.

Having gone through the system, many of us perhaps know personal stories. I can tell you that when the accusations made against a teacher, a principal or a vice-principal are in fact false, the reverberations in the community are incredible. They are incredibly negative. They destroy relationships. They compromise the integrity of the profession because there is this black mark. Even when those accusations are proven to be wrong, the damage is done. The damage is done when that happens, when false accusations happen. Even when there is justice for that individual, the damage is done.

I can tell you from personal experience that my own community is dealing with a situation where they thought they knew someone in the education system, and it turns out that they did not. I am witnessing it first-hand: the cycle of trauma, the disbelief, the anger, these emotional ups and downs that the community is experiencing—because everyone will question themselves. They question themselves; they question their involvement; they question what action they might have taken to prevent these issues from happening. Quite honestly, the pain is really quite long-standing, regardless of the outcome at this point in time.

The need to have an open and transparent process which puts the student at the centre and guards the rights of those employees who are contained within that system—who, quite honestly, have a massive responsibility, given their legislative responsibility for well-being—can be very overwhelming. I'm hopeful that Bill 37, when it does get to the amendment stage, actually can address some of the gaps that are contained within this legislation.

I would just close by quoting the former president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. His name is Michael Barrett. He said:

"We certainly understand that this will have some impact on some teachers, but it will be a very small number of teachers."

"We support the concept of transparency, and a better definition of what would constitute the teacher being banned from teaching. We are pleased that the minister acted quickly on the recommendations—some of those recommendations have gone above and beyond what's in the LeSage report."

I think what you can tell from today's debate is that everyone in this Legislature understands the weight of this issue. It is a responsibility that we all bear. It is legislation that needs to be incredibly clear around rules, around responsibilities, around repercussions and around, ultimately, justice for the students and for the employees that are contained within our system.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being close to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1754.

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